

19세미만 구독불가



하늘가리기

Lucia

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JOCCA

Lucia

– 루시아 –

- Book 3 -

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Covering The Sky

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[RubyMaybe]

Chapter 30

Damian (1)

TN: The highly anticipated title: Damian is finally here! Also: Poll over.

“Young master, I am Ashin, the administrative secretary. Do you remember me?”

Damian briefly looked up and down at Ashin before giving him a stiff nod and entering the carriage. His coldness is not inferior to his father's.

‘This is why they say you can't feign blood...’

Perhaps the Duke was just like this when he was a child. With his black hair and red eyes, Damian was a miniature Taran Duke. There was probably no need to use the royal family's magical treasure to determine his ancestry.

No one would be able to say that the little lord was not of the Taran Duke's blood.

‘Whew... this is just my fate.’

He hated long-distance trips. He would be extremely satisfied if all he had to do was routinely go back and forth between Roam and the house. He couldn't help but sigh when he thought about having to sit next to that dreary little kid for a long time.

“I see you've been healthy and comfortable in the meantime. You've grown a lot, I almost didn't recognize you.”

Ashim spoke amiably in a bland effort to elevate the mood. It wasn't something he usually did but he didn't want to be taken as a thug and Ashin found the little Taran duke that looked exactly like the Taran Duke whom he knew as the scariest man in the world, to be extremely prickly.

Also, it was the truth that he almost didn't recognize him.

‘Whew... what eight year old is like this? He looks like he could be three to four years

older. My nephew is ten years old but even he is smaller than our little lord.'

Even when the little lord was six years old, he had a burly physique so there were already signs of it back then.

Just like how a fox and a tiger were of different sizes.

'If he keeps growing like this, won't he end up with a huge frame? Completely different from what's on paper.'

"...what is it?"

"Huh?"

Ashin felt pleased with himself as the mouth of the little lord had finally opened.

"You know with your rank, you didn't have to pick me up personally."

"Ha... ha-ha."

Right. Someone of his status usually wouldn't have to. Although he didn't think those words were something that would have come out of an eight year old's mouth.

'Let's put aside him remembering me... he remembers my rank?'

The Taran Duke's bloodline must have something different. When he thought of it that way, he felt it was unfair and could also understand.

Even the current Taran Duke was like that. As a knight and as one of the best, his brain was excellent.

'The world is originally unfair.'

He realized this the day his childish innocence was broken.

"It was the order of his Grace the Duke."

Damian's eyes grew a little bigger.

'Why?'

His expression seemed to be was asking.

“I believe young master has already heard the news. The Taran Duke now has a Lady of the House.”

Damian nodded his head. He usually received news about the Duke in a relatively detailed manner.

In order for him to take over in the future, the Duke intended for him to know about everything.

No matter how long he had left the house and no matter whether he was in a boarding school that was cut off from outside news, it was all so that the Duke would never hear the words, ‘I didn’t know’.

Damian memorized the letter that had been sent, word for word.

“These are just my thoughts but since both of you now have a mother-son relationship, I think both of you should get to know each other as a family.”

‘Mother-son relationship, you say?’

Damian inwardly questioned. His father was not such a delicate person. The idea that the Duke would want them to have a strong mother and son relationship did not make any sense.

Perhaps he and the Duchess would bite and tear at each other and the Duke wouldn’t be interested until one of them died.

“He didn’t say anything else?”

“Ah... he... wanted you to... not be rude to your mother. Said you should show proper respect...”

‘Well that’s that.’

Ashin had simplified it but he had delivered the warning. He just had to stay there quietly without being nervous.

Even though he was the successor, he was still illegitimate. Which meant he shouldn’t

needlessly get on the Duchess' nerves.

Even if the Duke didn't warn him, Damian had no intention of confronting his stepmother.

After all, the consent of the Duchess was absolutely necessary to elevate his status.

"Is she pretty?"

"Huh? Ah... I have only seen her a few times..."

'You only needs to see someone once to know if they are pretty or not.'

Due to Ashin's hesitant response, Damian came to a conclusion.

'She must not be that pretty.'

Damian's interest in his stepmother was only to that extent, after which he folded that thought.

Looking at it from his stepmother's point of view, Damian didn't expect to be welcomed and expected that while he was in Roam, they would only meet a few times.

He would live as quiet as he were dead. If she didn't want to see his face, he would lock himself up in the room and she harassed him and it was tolerable, he planned on just enduring it.

Damian was not very surprised when he heard that the Duke was getting married. He expected that the Duke had only done so because it was around time for him to get married.

Damian was grasping the cold temperament of his father that was only moved by necessity.

Even if the Duchess were to give birth to a child, Damian's status as the successor would not be shaken.

His father was never a good father but he was someone that one could have firm belief in.

Damian's attention then switched towards the Academy. The sudden summon at the beginning of the semester had messed up his schedule.

He was initially worried about leaving and falling behind since he didn't know when he would be returning. At worst, he would have had to give up on the entire semester.

'At most, I'll be there for a week.'

It would take about three weeks if the journey back and forth was included.

If he didn't want to fall behind when he returned, he couldn't let any of his time be spent in vain.

Damian had already filled the trunk of the carriage to the brim with books.



TN: A little change: I will start using Milady instead of your Grace for some parts. A little abrupt but the change needed to happen.

The news of the Taran Duke's marriage had come from someone's mouth and was passed from mouth to mouth before reaching the high society.

It only came up in people's conversations. There was no one that had attended the wedding so only the rumor had blown up because people did not know any other way to satisfy their curiosity.

Kwiz was of course, also curious and had put in a lot of money and time into satisfying that curiosity.

Since the woman that became the Duchess was a princess, it was hard to find anyone eager to investigate into it.

No matter how much he dug into it, he couldn't find anything. The only accurate information was her name and age.

There was no one that knew even a little thing about the princess.

However, if it was considered a harvest to get her description from the maids in the palace that waited on her shortly before she married, then it was a harvest.

And so he became more unyielding. He was convinced he had an information source that was capable in its own way but it took them digging around for months and coming up with nothing to wake him up.

“What is going on? It’s not like they fell from the sky.”

Kwiz lamented the absurdness of it all. It wasn’t just Kwiz that had tried to find out about the princess.

The Royal Intelligence Division had also dug into Princess Vivian by investigating her detached palace but in the process, the manipulation of the palace maiden’s roll call was revealed.

The palace was turned inside out on the large scale and the head proprietors were held responsible and severely punished.

Kwiz dispatched someone to the village that the princess had lived until she was twelve years old and entered the palace but even the person that had been close to the mother-daughter pair shook her head, saying she’d never heard of it.

After digging and digging for several months, he got his hands on the letter that the princess’ mother had sent to the palace before she died.

“No clue from this too...”

Kwiz sighed after reading the short letter on the old piece of paper.

All it said was that she’d slept with the King one day and gave birth to the princess. There was nothing revealed about their relationship and nothing that gave hints about her mother’s identity. Her mother didn’t even sign her name.

“Could it be... her mother was a commoner...?”

He was slightly suspicious but it didn’t seem like it. Even though it seemed like that old geezer played around with whatever woman available, he had a preference.

It was unlikely that he would embrace a common woman with rough skin and hands that were coarse from labor.

“Do you really not know anything, Sir Krotin?”

Kwiz asked Roy, his escort guard that liked to disappear, the same question he'd asked countless times already.

"I don't. Even if I knew, I don't." [Roy]

His irritating and discourteous manner of speaking caused the prince's aide standing next to him to scowl.

Compared to him, the Crown Prince's expression did not change although one couldn't know what he felt inside.

"Even something else is fine. Just how the hell did those two meet and marry?"

I'm curious to death!

Looking at Kwiz's frustrated expression because of his unsatisfied curiosity, Roy secretly snickered.

'I know.'

It was quite enjoyable to know the secret that someone else was struggling to know.

"Come to think of it, you have a duel tomorrow, right, Sir Krotin?"

"Yes."

Factions of Counts hostile to the Crown Prince did not dare to directly confront the Crown Prince, so they picked a fight with the rigid Roy.

When he refused in his usual manner of speaking, flinging a few words at them, they would throw down their gauntlet to the ground saying he'd insulted them. (1)

And Roy gladly accepted. He had never once avoided a fight brought to him.

"Do I take it gently? I mean for the duel tomorrow." [Roy]

Kwiz burst into laughter.

"Is that a new joke? What kind of joke is that? Don't think about me, just fight to your heart's content."

It wasn't like Roy wanted to fight personally but sending a knight of his family while they were assuming he would be fighting was an unbecoming sight so he was looking for an opportunity to crush them.

He could easily handle the knight than proposed the retaliation duel, it was their fault for serving the wrong master.

But because he was worried about causing an accident, he asked the prince. If an accident happened, it wouldn't be a matter of the prince's face but his lord would beat him to death.

"Got it." [Roy]

'I got permission.' Roy laughed contentedly.

The Crown prince would continue to recall this day in the future for a while.

It was the beginning of the 'Mad Dog' Krotin. (2)



When news of the Duke of Taran's marriage arrived, quite a lot of women felt their hearts break.

Anita was surprised but unlike those women, she just felt a little bitter. She had already married three times and had never even dreamt of marrying the Duke of Taran.

She was satisfied with being the lover that he didn't forget and came to see from time to time.

'When he is tired of his new bride, he will contact me.'

She kept her composure and waited but instead of getting contacted, she received a yellow rose.

She gaped spiritlessly at the bundle of yellow roses in front of her for an entire day, then got herself sick from stressing over it for ten days.

When she was barely able to even move her body, a question arose in her mind.

“Just why?”

No matter how much she thought about it, she hadn't made any mistakes.

She'd never contacted him, asked him about his whereabouts or even mentioned their relationship.

Rather, when she heard the news that he was married, she'd stayed away even more.

She just couldn't understand his breakup declaration.

Removing his lover because he was married? He was never such a conscientious gentleman.

She suppressed her heart that wanted to immediately run to his manor and ask him why.

Because she knew that once she did that, she couldn't take it back.

In the past, she'd heard of a woman who had stormed into his manor after being notified of their separation but after that incident, she never saw that woman in the noble circles again.

After thinking about it over and over again, she came to the conclusion that it was the one who had become the Duchess, Princess Vivian.

The new bride must have learnt of Anita's existence and urged him to break it off.

And since he didn't have that of an attachment to Anita anyways, it was obvious he'd just agreed to his wife's request.

Anita began to investigate into who Princess Vivian was. At first, everything was as it seems.

However, the facts that were revealed to her little by little was so interesting that at some point, Anita began hunting day and night for information about Princess Vivian.

Anita investigated into her and her unique senses did not let any sort of information slip.

The first thing that caught her attention was the record of Princess Vivian attending the victory ball. The princess that was practically trapped in the palace and did not know anybody attended a victory ball.

Any woman would wonder; what about her dress? Her make-up? Her hair?

It was akin to randomly casting a net into water and reeling the fish in one by one; little by little, things about Princess Vivian were revealed.

She found out that the princess used to disguise herself as a maid and frequently left the castle. For the dress, Anita concluded the princess had to have procured it personally.

Princess Vivian wasn't a princess that knew nothing about the world. Anita placed a portrait on the table and watched it without moving for a while.

It was a portrait based on descriptions of Princess Vivian that she'd obtained after handing out some bribes.

When Anita first saw it, she was relieved.

The person in the portrait was far from his taste. After reaching the conclusion that the marriage was just a marriage of convenience, she slept well.

But after a while, Anita's heart became restless again. Yes, she wasn't his taste but wouldn't it be more likely for him to fall for her because of that?

Men were usually attracted to new things. She began to get worried about this unusual point of the princess that liked to cosplay as a maid.

'Even if he's interested in it for a while... it shouldn't take long to cool off. At any time and who knows, he may come find me.'

She comforted herself while her anxiety grew even more. He hadn't ever seen a woman that he'd sent a yellow rose a second time.

After she received the yellow rose, Anita barely had any days where she'd slept properly.

'He only married because he needed to. He's a man that does not know how to love a

woman.'

While looking at Princess Vivian's portrait, Anita constantly repeated those words in her head.

He was someone who drifted from one woman to another without ever settling down. It was hope based on the false premise that his heart wouldn't ever be caught by a woman. It was also her pride.

Just thinking about that actually happening filled her heart with anxiety.

'I have to see the real Princess Vivian.'

She wanted to calm her anxiety by meeting Princess Vivian and confirming that she wasn't in his eyes.

'Do I go to the North and confirm it without him knowing...?'

If she didn't take the 'gates', a carriage there would take several months. She couldn't even bear the thought of doing that.

To use the Northern 'gate', one had to gain the approval of the Taran Duke and no matter how formal the process was, she was afraid of the backlash if he ever found out.

It would be better to just wait for the two to return to the capital.

'Why did she pretend to be a maid and leave the palace? What did she do outside the palace? Did she have a lover...?'

A lover. That was very possible.

Finding Princess Vivian was going to be the real starting point from now on. Her initial intention of just checking out Princess Vivian's face was gone.

Translator's Corner:

1. So simple trivia: to throw down the gauntlet means to issue a challenge to a duel.
2. The previous translator translated this to 'Crazy Dog', I prefer 'Mad Dog.'

Chapter 31

Damian (2)

A jet-black carriage hurried across the streets of Roam.

Taking a closer look at the little black wooden carriage, one could find the motif of a black lion drawn on it.

The black carriage was so fascinating that people stopped what they were doing to look at it when it first appeared.

The black wood used as the main material of the carriage was as strong as steel and is said to have been used by the military in the past.

And because many people withered to death from the sickness gotten from the natural habitat of the black wood, the price of black wood had now surpassed that of gold.

Hugo had made this carriage of black wood for the safety of his wife so Lucia often went out in a carriage that was fit for a King.

At this point, people already knew who was inside whenever the black carriage passed by.

Most people would never get to see the faces of the ones inside such a carriage in their lifetime because the ones inside were in such a high position.

And so, when the carriage appeared, they just watched it till it was out of their sight.

When the carriage crossed the bridge and entered the gates, the sound of a horn was heard. The black horse carriage carrying Lucia continued to run and stopped in front of the deepest inner tower in the Roam Castle.

The employees were all outside to greet the Lady. When Lucia returned from her horse riding, just as usual, she took a bath then sat in the receiving room, drinking the fragrant tea that Jerome served.

“Did you enjoy your outing, Milady?” (Jerome)

“I enjoyed it. Emily is a really kind child, she followed my clumsy instructions very well.”

Her favorite horse, Emily was a nice and well-trained mare that Hugo had given to her.

Lucia didn't really know much about horses but when she looked at its glossy appearance she could guess it was a good horse.

Whenever Lucia heard compliments about its loveliness, she just shrugged her shoulders.

“Who said such a thing? Even if you had 10 horses, you can't replace Emily. She is a very expensive horse.”

“Yes. It seems that way.”

As it was not polite to discuss the price of his master's gift, Jerome did not say the details. Lucia didn't ask either, but she was thankful that Hugo thought about her and gave her precious horse as a gift.

‘I miss him...’

“When is he coming back?”

“Yes? Ah... I don't know exactly, but it can be long. I think it will be about a month.”

“A month...? What exactly is going on? I know it's work in the fief...”

Before, she was not interested in what he was doing, but now she wanted to know more about it.

“Some parts are about the fief, others are not. It is something Master goes to annually.”

Jerome tried to emphasize that his master's sudden departure was only for work reasons and definitely not for a private reason. He did not know about the dramatic reconciliation of the couple.

“Milady already knows that the northern border is close to the barbarians. They is no

central tribe so from time to time, they cross the border to plunder. Master subdues them once a year to keep them in check.”

“Then, every year, he leaves at this time of the year?.”

“This year is earlier than other years. He usually leaves early in the winter. I heard that an order to dispatch arrived. It seems that they haven’t been payed much attention to after the war so the plundering became more frequent.”

“It must be hard for the Northern people who continuously get anxious because of this.”

“If they doesn’t live close to the border, I don’t think they would be anxious. It’s a lot different when one looks at it from afar.”

Lucia nodded her head, sipping a little tea then suddenly exclaimed.

“Oh my goodness! How could I forget? Isn’t today his birthday Jerome?”

The birthday date that Jerome had reminded her of before was exactly today. She’d kept it in her mind but she had forgotten about it because they were fighting.

“I should have told him before he left. It’s his birthday but he won’t receive any congratulation, he’ll just be fighting barbarians.”

She felt so sad for him that her heart hurt.

“Mmm... Milady, Master had never taken care of his birthday separately.”

“I expected that. Who would take care of his birthday like that? Only the people around him can.”

“That... he doesn’t like being reminded of it.”

“...Why?”

“I don’t really know much. However I often get the feeling that not only about his birthday, Master also dislikes being reminded of his childhood.”

Jerome never spoke of anything he was unsure of or carelessly speak his mind but

because she looked very sad, he gave a sincere reply.

‘So he doesn’t have any memories he wants to remember from his childhood...’

That was a sad thing.

Lucia lived a difficult life and there was a moment in her life where her memory was perfect. She was happy until she was twelve years old. The times when she lived with her mother as a child were happy times.

The story of the Duke’s tragedy in the west tower once again rose to the forefront of Jerome’s mind. It was a terrible thing at the time and he shouldn’t think of it nor speak of it so he tried to forget it.

However the thought always arose whenever he laid eyes on the west tower, and as time went on, he grew more interested in the background story than the murder itself.

The dead Duke had abandoned one of his sons to stop misfortune and left him to his own fate. As he did something no parent should ever do, he brought it upon himself.

“Jerome, you said you’ve never met the dead Duke before, right?”

“Yes. I have served master ever since he became a knight.”

“I may just be my prejudice but I think he was a very heartless man.”

Jerome hesitated for a moment then spoke.

“From the little fragments of him that I have gathered, I don’t think my thoughts differ very much from Milady’s”

‘His past is very far from ordinary.’ (Lucia)



Hugo did not know his mother’s face as she’d died not too long after delivery while his father abandoned one son after weighing the advantages and disadvantages.

It was only natural he grew to have such a cold and emotionless personality. Or rather, considering his past, he had grown quite excellently.

‘Abandoning a newborn baby? I just can’t understand why he would do that.’ (Lucia)

It wasn’t like any problems had cropped up but because a trouble might happen, he abandoned his newborn son.

It was genuinely Hugo’s luck that he was chosen to be the successor to the Duke.

‘If he was the one abandoned... he might have been the dead brother and murderer...’

Numerous noble families have constantly dealt with successor problems, whether in the past, present or future but there had been no case where it was solved in this way. When it became known, it was something that many people criticized.

‘He said offsprings were rare in the Taran family, right? If offsprings were rare then the twins should have been raised more preciously.’

It just didn’t add up.

‘In the case of Damian, sure, he is the precious son of a family with precious offsprings.’

Damian is the only son. He is the successor.

Even if one can say Damian was sent to boarding school in order to bring him up strictly, there was even no contact between them.

There was way too much indifference.

‘Was it because he didn’t receive much affection from his father when he was a child that he doesn’t know how to give it?’

The more she thought about it, the more things she found strange. As she constantly asked and answered questions in her mind, she fell into deep contemplation.

‘He’s had many women. It wouldn’t be strange if he had a few illegitimate children.’

But she hadn’t heard of him having any more children in her dreams.

‘Was it so hard to get a child that he had to make Damian the successor?’

Then, there should be no reason for him to be reluctant about Lucia getting pregnant.

It would make more sense if he wanted make as many offsprings as possible.

The reason many nobles preferred fertility and competition between their children for succession was for the future of their family.

Having only one successor carried innumerable risks.

When she got into an argument with him, she was carried away by her emotions and was unable to analyze his words calmly so now she unhurriedly contemplated his words.

[I don't need a child.]

[I don't want to leave my mark.]

He didn't say that because he was afraid of the conflict for succession.

'Mark.'

The nuance of the expression contained an underlying repulsion.

'Then what of Damian? Is it that he didn't want it but the woman didn't even tell him she was pregnant and gave birth?'

It was quite possible.

Rather than the forceful removal of a child, the aftereffects of giving birth was much easier on a woman's body. Many illegitimate children were born this way. Lucia was born this way too.

'If he didn't really want a child, then he shouldn't have been so negligent.'

She only wished to see the good side of the man that she loved but she had to acknowledge that he had a cold and cruel side to him.

He would have forced an abortion if he really did not want the child.

'Merely abortion? He could do even worse.'

Her reasoning whispered to her but she ignored it. Anyways, she wanted to see as

much as possible, the good side of the man she loved.

‘No. If you look at his age when Damian was born... he was at a young age so there could have been a gap... He is a person too, he can make mistakes.’

Perhaps because he had revealed his inner feelings for some time when they last fought, she could somewhat tell that Damian didn’t seem to be born from love.

‘Even if you don’t want to, the born child has done nothing wrong. It seems like he’s abandoned Damian. Usually, men felt deep affection for their flesh and blood but... as if Damian isn’t his real son... ’

It was a random thought that appeared in her mind but she was suddenly overcome with intense suspicion.

‘That’s... ridiculous.’

“Milady, do I fill it with more tea?”

Jerome’s voice shook her out of her reverie and she looked down at her hand to find her cup empty.

“Ah?... Sure.”

Lucia’s heart drummed as she watched the teacup fill up.

“Jerome... have you ever seen the little lord?”

Jerome flinched and began to study Lucia. ‘Is she starting again?’ his expression read as he grew nervous.

“...Yes.”

“Does he... resemble him a lot?”

“...Yes. They look very similar, to a very shocking extent.”

‘I guess my leap in logic was too much... well, of course, it’s a ridiculous idea.’

Allowing someone that wasn’t his blood to inherit his name? Something like that

wouldn't happen.

She tried to get the foolish idea out of her mind but she still felt like something was missing.

"Did you see Damian when he was born? And how did he enter the Ducal House?"

Jerome made a troubled face. No matter how much he wanted to tell everything to her Grace, there was a limit to things.

"I apologize, Milady. I am unable to speak indiscreetly about anything concerning the young master. I think it would be better to ask master."

Although it was a pity, she didn't want to put Jerome in a difficult position.

Lucia thought about it for a long time, she felt like she'd caught onto something but at the same time, it felt like she hadn't so although there was some suspicion, she couldn't reach a definite conclusion.

In the evening on the same day, a maid brought medicine into her bedroom as she prepared to fall asleep.

Anna hadn't been able to find a cure yet so she put Lucia on medicine that was beneficial to a woman's womb.

As she took a sip, the uniquely unpalatable and slightly bitter taste of the medicine entered her mouth.

'The taste of that drug was quite unique too.'

Although it was in her dreams, Lucia still remembered the taste of the medicine she had taken to treat the mugwort poisoning in her body because it had quite the unique taste.

'The scent of vanilla... it smelled just like that.'

The next day, Lucia was taking a walk around the garden after a meal.

"Milady!"

A maid ran up to her full of urgency, her expression looking quite flustered.

“What is it?”

“The... the little lord... he’s here.”

As Jerome looked at the red-eyed and dark-haired boy that looked very similar to his master, he held back his confusion from showing and when the little lord wasn’t paying attention, he gave Ashin a fierce glare.

Ashin was startled and furtively avoided his gaze.

“It’s been a long time, young master. Has all been well?”

As usual, Damian had nothing to criticize in the Jerome that greeted him politely. But.

‘He’s confused.’

Damian thought to himself as he watched Jerome’s absentminded manner. More accurately speaking, Jerome’s perfect expression and attitude did not reveal anything.

However, even if Jerome didn’t do anything, the employees had all lined up nearby to receive him when he’d arrived at the castle but all of them, including the guarding knights, had the same expression that read:

‘What are you doing here?’

“It’s been a while.” (Damian)

“I take it you are tired from your long journey. Have you had your lunch?” (Jerome)

“Not yet but I’ll have it later. The carriage kept wobbling so my stomach is uncomfortable.”

“I understand, young master. Then I shall escort you to your bedroom so you may rest...”

Jerome suddenly stopped talking and the surroundings fell into a strange silence. Damian expected that someone had appeared and he could take a guess as to who it was.

Damian then turned his head in the direction of everyone else's gaze.

The woman that entered through the half-open door of the receiving room must have been running for her shoulders were moving up and down.

The brown-haired woman looked younger and smaller than he'd expected and appeared breathless and tense.

'Is she...'

The Lady of the House of Taran. The Duchess and Damian's stepmother.



'Wow...'

Once she heard the maid say that Damian had come, Lucia had run out. The moment she saw him, she had to stop to admire.

'How could they be so similar?'

Jerome's words were not exaggerated at all. With his red eyes and black hair, his features were as though someone took the Duke and reduced him to a smaller size. Could anyone even raise any doubt that he wasn't the Duke's son?

'Then that would be ridiculous. But surely... it isn't that he doesn't know the fact that he's been announced as successor...?'

Damian sighed a little as he looked at the Duchess that was watching him with wide eyes.

She'd just gotten married, but can only be at loss for words as her husband already has an illegitimate child.

Either she stiffens in shock, gives him a piercing glare, gets angry and storms away, looks at him like a disgusting worm or surprises him by slapping his cheeks.

These were the weakest plans. He wouldn't have to worry about the Duchess that showed these type of reactions.

If she stayed composed, masked her feelings while smiling and treating him like a son, it would be the wisest plan.

But it wouldn't be very good for him if the Duchess faced him this way.

Chapter 32

Damian (3)

“It’s a pleasure to meet you for the first time. My greetings are late, I’m Damian.”

Damian approached the Duchess and bowed his head, keeping an appropriate distance.

“Ah... nice to meet you.”

Damian glanced sideways at her when she replied in a gentle tone.

‘Is she too shocked that she can’t understand the current situation?’

There was no hostility or disgust in the amber colored eyes of the Duchess.

Maybe she was yet to put her emotions in order or was a high-level actress. He couldn’t decide yet.

Her appearance alone was different from the image he had pictured. He had imagined a lady full of the pride and gracefulness of a princess. She was more of innocence and gentleness than pride and gracefulness.

He couldn’t understand the Ashin that had answered evasively when he’d asked him if she was pretty.

‘But she is pretty... ’

“Milady, the young master just came back from a long carriage journey and mentioned he would like to rest.” (Jerome)

“Ah. He should get some rest. I know how exhausting a carriage trip can be. It’s around the time for lunch, has he eaten?”

“...He’s not in the mood for it.”

“Even so, he can’t continue to have an empty stomach till evening, he’s at the prime of his growth. Steward, have them prepare something easy on the stomach and bring it out. For dinner too, prepare something that digests easily.”

“Yes, Milady.”

The boy that had been silently staring at Lucia, bowed his head and followed a servant. When the boy had gone far enough that he wouldn’t see her, Lucia grabbed her reddening face with both hands.

‘Ah, my goodness! So cute!’

He was a mini Duke! He was the childhood of the Duke that Lucia had not seen. It wasn’t just his appearance but his stiff and cold expressions were practically a carbon copy.

“Milady...?”

Jerome was worried that her Grace would be shocked but when she turned her head, her eyes were twinkling.

“You said he was eight, right Jerome?”

“That is correct. He was born with an uncommonly huge physique.”

“I see... Indeed, I don’t think it would make any sense if his son was small.”

“Are you... okay?”

“What?”

“...No, nothing.”

“He’s a much cuter child than I expected. Looks kind too.”

“...yes???”

The word ‘cute’ was definitely not a word that matched the young master. It may have during his early childhood but definitely not now.

And kind? Where did she see that? The young master resembles the Duke in looking like he wouldn't bleed even if you stabbed him. Her Grace's eyes were questionable.
(1)

"If I say I want to have dinner together, would it be uncomfortable?" (Lucia)

"...If Milady isn't uncomfortable, then..."

"Uncomfortable indeed. I'm looking forward to dinner tonight."

Jerome watched as her Grace left the receiving room cheerfully then fell into deep thought. She had the completely opposite reaction that the normal person would have.

It was the tragic situation of a new bride marrying in and within a few months of marriage, her husband's older son shows up. Her Grace's reaction was definitely not normal.

Maybe she didn't know the seriousness of the situation or maybe her Grace was just someone with no discretion.

Jerome then grabbed Ashin and pulled him into the steward's office. He glared sharply at Ashin while Ashin was trying his best to avoid the gaze on him, his eyes wandering all over the ceiling.

"What the hell is going on, Sir Ashin?"

"What do you mean?"

"What did you not tell me you would be picking up the young master?"

"That... well, I thought you already knew."

"Even if you thought that way, you should have informed me or Milady."

"...that... his Grace didn't give any instruction to do so..."

Jerome grabbed him by the neck. It wasn't like he was a rookie that had just become an administrative officer so, was that something a secretary should say?

If someone's worked as long as Ashin has, they should have figured out the Duke's

nature by now.

It was very often that the Duke would give orders without the process to carry it out, and if one person could pass on his words to others then that was the end of it.

He had no interest in whether there was communication or not. It was all on their heads if there was a problem due to lack of communication.

And so, vassals of the Duke would often have short meetings between themselves to check if there were any holes in their knowledge.

“Do I have to point things out to you to that extent, Sir Ashin?”

Occasionally in some areas, the usually swift Ashin would strangely have his flexibility drop to a bottom when it came to work regarding the Duke.

Jerome heard a knock as he was about to continue speaking and after a while, the door opened slowly and Fabian’s head peeked in.

“What’s going on? Oh, Sir Ashin, It’s been a long time.”

“Fabian! It’s been a while. Then you brothers can sort out yourselves... I’ll just...”

They shared a brief handshake, lightly knocked their shoulders and as soon as the greeting was over, Ashin felt as though he’d found a way to survive and immediately scurried off.

“What’s the matter?” (Fabian)

Jerome sighed deeply.

“It’s not a big deal. Master isn’t here right now, what is it? Didn’t you hear he was going to deal with the barbarians?” (Jerome)

“I know. I received different order so I came here. It seems like the young master is here?”

“He arrived a little while ago.”

“Your expression doesn’t seem good. Is her Grace very unhappy?”

“No, it’s not like that.”

Unhappy? She liked it so much that even her steps grew lighter. He gave up on explaining to Fabian because Fabian would just call it nonsense. He would allow Fabian to see it with his own eyes.

“I was suddenly asked to bring the family registry document so was wondering what was going on. The young master is back, huh.”

“...Registry documents?”

“Although I don’t know if her Grace has given her consent. How are those two these days? Is his Grace still in his honeymoon mood?”

“Watch your words.”

Jerome seemed very unimpressed with the topic as he frowned intensely and Fabian awkwardly shrugged his shoulders.

“What of the capital? Anything new?” (Jerome)

“There’s always something new in that place.”

Fabian recalled an incident that had caused a racket in the high society not too long ago. Roy Krotin, the current escort to the crown prince, beat a knight of a Count’s family half-dead.

It wouldn’t be a problem if it was a legitimate duel but the duel was quite undefined.

It would be correct to say he was suppressed by Roy’s skills but the method was controversial.

Roy provoked the Knight by not drawing his sword; saying that if he was made to draw his sword, he would admit defeat, causing the opposing knight to blow his top.

And Roy beat up the Knight that jumped at him with his sword like a rag doll.

When Fabian first heard the news, he was speechless but afterwards, he couldn’t stop laughing. He knew that Roy was someone that his Lord often wreaked havoc on to beat sense into him.

Sure enough, there was controversy as to whether it was a fair duel. The count ran around asking what type of duel that was meanwhile at the crown prince's side, when he heard that Roy had crushed them with his skills, he burst into laughter.

And so, suddenly, Roy swiftly became the center of interest in the social circles. Fabian found the situation extremely hilarious but he didn't think Jerome would find it funny too so he just kept it to himself.

"Ah right. These days, there's a rumor floating around about the mine that his Grace gave as a dowry." (Fabian)

"Why has that turned into a rumor?"

A dowry was a private matter that only those involved in the exchange should know about.

For the receiver, it said how much one sold their daughter for, and for the giver, it was how much money one paid for their wife and so, to keep up appearances, it was the proper courtesy not to talk about it.

"What do you think? It's obvious who spread it. The King must have boasted about it so it spread."

"That... tsk."

The two brothers clicked their tongue in disapproval towards the senseless king.

"Anyways, that's why all sorts of rumors are flying around. It is said that because her Grace is such a beauty, even if a man looks from afar he would fall for her so his Grace fell for her at a glance, gave away his entire mine and dragged her to his estate so that no one could see her."

Honestly speaking, her Grace wasn't to that extent.

Looking at the sight of Fabian giggling away, Jerome clicked his tongue.

"Someone like Milady is beautiful."

"...Did you eat something wrong?"

“Mmn, The problem is poking fun at other people without any basis. That’s too much...”

“What’s too much? His Grace doesn’t care about things like rumors.”

Was it really like that? Jerome had a hunch that his master wouldn’t be indifferent to rumors concerning her Grace. He was almost certain of it.

Translator’s Corner:

1. Basically it’s saying that they are tough men to the extent you have to wonder if they really have blood in their veins.



Damian thought he’d slept for a long time but when he got up, it was still bright outside.

Damian’s bedroom was located in one of the buildings connected to the central tower. It was a room originally built to be a nursery for the Duke’s children.

It was considerably wide, ranging from the bedroom to the study room, big enough for up to ten children to stay in.

When Damian looked outside the window from the second floor of the bedroom that had been his until he left for boarding school, he could see the garden that was covered with colorful flowers.

‘Is this the work of the Duchess...’

He’d thought that flowers were unsuitable for the dreary Ducal House but surprisingly, they didn’t look out of place and the scent of the flowers filled the air.

He didn’t usually feel any sort of love or hate towards flowers but he thought it would be good to see the garden that was full of flowers.

And so, Damian went down to the garden. The scent that filled his nose was much more intense.

“Damian.”

It was first time the boy realized that his name could be said so sweetly. He stopped abruptly and turned to look at the approaching Duchess. As Damian laid his eyes on the Duchess who looked extremely happy, he tilted his head.

‘Why is she happy?’

“Did you sleep well? You woke up pretty early. Aren’t you hungry?”

It was a soft and clear voice. Her pleasant voice was filled with goodwill. Damian pulled the reins of his cautiousness tighter. What an incredible actress.

“...I’m okay for now.”

“Have I perhaps interrupted you?”

“No.”

Damian had no memory of his birth mother and whether it was his professors or the students at the academy, they were all male. The women that worked in the kitchen or did the chores were all middle-aged women.

He’d never conversed with a young woman that he wasn’t in an employment relationship with, so he was extremely awkward.

“I thought the garden looked great so I came here.” (Damian)

“I just planted a bunch of flowers but I’m glad you think it’s nice.” (Lucia)

“You can speak more comfortably.” (Damian) *(TN: She’d been using formal speech)*

“Mm... Sure? I don’t really care much but... would that be more comfortable for you?”

“Yes.”

“Alright. If you’re taking a walk, would you like to take a short walk with me?” *(TN: She’s switched to informal)*

“...Yes.”

As they silently walked through the path in the garden, Lucia continued to sneak glances at the boy.

The more she looked, the more amazed she got. It seemed like her heart that had been wanting to see him could be satisfied by looking at Damian for some time.

Even the boy's stiff and polite tone somehow resembled him.

"I heard you were at boarding school. Is this a vacation?"

"...There are no vacations but an outing is possible. His Grace asked me to come so I came. He also asked me to give my greetings to the Duchess."

"Ah..."

Damian was definitely keeping a distance from her. She could feel it.

'Although truthfully, if he'd called me mother once... mm... it may have been a tad creepy...'

When noble children reach the age of discretion, they would oftentimes become obsessed with a sense of entitlement and become arrogant and impudent.

There were also cases where they remain the same even after they matured, but still, when they grew older, they learnt how to keep what they really thought inside and pretend on the outside.

Damian was now eight years old but was as disciplined as a knight. But even so, she could only see him as the child he was.

'Is this the power of boarding schools? Then it would be nice to send all noble children to boarding schools.'

The fact that she was not in a position high enough to enforce such a thought was the fortune of all noble children.

"Damian, honestly speaking, right now, it is hard for me to think of you as a son."

So direct—! Damian paused in surprise and looked at Lucia.

“You too, right? It’s hard for you to think of me as your mother.”

I didn’t expect this kind of method! Damian chose his words carefully.

“...I apologize. Did I make a mistake...”

“No. I’m not blaming you, I’m just saying it’s natural. We’ve just met, we don’t know each other so it’s only natural to be unfamiliar.”

Red eyes much smaller than his (Hugo’s) looked at Lucia. He evoked in Lucia the image of a young animal that had just learned about the world. He lifted his eyebrows adorably, searching her like she was the first existence he’d ever seen.

To the Lucia who had gotten accustomed to the predatory gaze of the gigantic beast called Hugo, Damian’s sharp gaze was merely just that.

‘So cute. So cute!’

Her hands were fidgeting. She wanted to pinch his cheeks a little or even pat his head.

Lucia restrained herself from doing so as that would make him more vigilant.

“We only differ in age by ten years. If I had a ten year old child at my age, then your father becomes a criminal.” (Lucia) (1)

Damian quickly suppressed the huge smile that was about to break out on his face.

“So, I want us to try and get a little bit closer to each other. Instead of being so formal and calling me ‘Duchess’, call me by my name, Lucia. It’s my childhood name.”

“...”

“Let’s get along from now on, Damian.”

Lucia had been influenced in various ways from hanging out with Kate. It would be hard to change her fundamental character but she liked Kate’s straightforward way of speaking so she was trying to be more like that.

She stretched out her hand to ask for a handshake while Damian stared blankly at her hand. He couldn’t make out what the Duchess wanted.

Why would she want to do such a troublesome thing? Damian was definitely the weaker party between him and the Duchess. He was young in age and an illegitimate child.

When the Duchess gives birth to a child in the future, he would be an obstacle. There was no reason for the Duchess to try and improve their relationship.

“Is that difficult?” (Lucia)

“...No.”

Damian grabbed the Duchess’s hand in front of him.

‘I don’t know what her true motive is but... since I can’t read my opponent yet, I have no choice but to accept.’

Although Damian was young, he wasn’t an idiot that would reveal his aggression to an opponent whose intentions he couldn’t grasp.

An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. If she hid a knife behind her smile, he would do the same too. He was still young and did not have any power.

It was a time where he definitely could not upset anyone.

‘Seems like it will be hard to get close.’ (Lucia)

Damian thought he was hiding his thoughts but to the Lucia that had experienced a lot in life, the vigilance of a young child was obvious to her.

Even if she said that she wasn’t his enemy, he wouldn’t believe her.

With his position as an illegitimate child without a mother around to embrace him and a father that did not give him warm care and attention, no matter who it was, they would be disillusioned.

‘After some time, it will be okay. My sincerity will definitely be seen someday.’

Lucia knew that she would love his son just as much as she loved him.

Chapter 33

Damian (4)

Anna returned from her outing with her hands full of books tied up in a string. These days, she'd been working on finding a cure for the Duchess.

She'd combed through the bookstore and collected all the books related to medicinal herbs and asked the owner of the bookstore to definitely contact her whenever a related book came in.

As Anna walked through the castle gates and entered the castle, she saw Dorothy, a middle-aged woman that she was usually close to, some distance away.

She wanted to raise her voice and greet her but because Dorothy was holding onto a man and acting fussy as she subserviently bowed her waist, she just watched blankly.

'Just looking at his attire, he doesn't seem like someone in a high position...'

When they separated, Anna approached Dorothy.

"Who was that? Seems like someone I'm seeing for the first time."

"The first time? Well, He is indeed someone full of wanderlust. He's the Duke's doctor."

"The Duke's doctor? Why have I never seen such a person?"

"You haven't stayed long in the castle. We didn't hear any news from him for a few years then he returned, stayed for a few days and left again. This time, he's stayed for almost two or three months. I don't know when he'll be leaving again."

"Is it okay for a doctor to just leave like that?"

"Because our Duke is such a strong person, he doesn't really need a doctor. It's often joked that the most idle person here is the Duke's doctor. But there is no one here that doubts his ability after all, our youngest had almost died but lived thanks to him."

Even though Anna was having a conversation, she kept glancing in the direction Philip had disappeared in.

The next day, Anna went to find Philip at his residence. It was wooden house nestled at the corner of the outer walls. There was thick tree near the house making it seem even more remote.

A primary physician should be able to arrive as early as possible if there was an emergency which was why Anna stayed inside of the castle.

Although it was said that he was the Duke's primary doctor, he always left his position to go on vacations, never looked for the Duke, and his residence was far away.

Somehow, there seemed to be an inside story to all of it. Just in time, Anna finally found Philip sitting on a chair in the backyard.

"Hello, Sir Philip. I am Anna, the Duchess' doctor. I heard the Duke's doctor was around so I came meet you and at the same time, give my greetings."

The old man with a somewhat odd air around him watched Anna slowly, as though he were searching her face, then displayed a good natured smile.

"Nice to meet you. You can just call me Philip."

"For me too, just call me Anna."

"You're a precious guest, come in. I will bring out some tea."

Philip's friendly response caused Anna's heart that was little nervous to relax and she followed him inside the house.

They drank tea, exchanged a few meaningless pleasantries and after a few words, the conversation became increasingly more about topics related to medicine.

Because they were both doctors, it was a common topic that they could talk about for even a whole day. During the conversation they had, Anna admired two things.

Philip's polite and elegant attitude and his medical knowledge. It was an occasion where the occupation of a doctor and the status of a noble Baron merged flawlessly.

Although, as a doctor, Anna's interest was more focused on Philip's medical knowledge.

'This person is skilled.'

Anna couldn't keep up with Philip's intelligence. Doctors usually have a unique treatment method that only themselves know about or have some understanding concerning diseases but when Philip began to speak, there was nothing he didn't know.

Or rather, he would even suggest an easier treatment method.

'If it's him... he might know about her Grace's symptoms.'

From the start, Anna's original purpose was to seek advice regarding the Duchess' symptoms. However, unlike the general sicknesses, her Grace's symptoms were a personal secret.

It continuously bothered her conscience as a doctor because a patient's secret must strictly be protected.

Even if they were doctors that worked in the same place, she couldn't readily talk about the symptoms.

And even if Anna looked at another patient, she was still the primary doctor of the Duchess. It wasn't something that she could just close her eyes and deny.

Anna eventually decided on simply studying as much books as she could, then departed from Philip's residence.

As Anna was returning from meeting Philip, she was summoned by Jerome.

"I called you because I have something to say. It seems you met Sir Philip today."
(Jerome)

"I... Are you monitoring me?"

"Ah, don't misunderstand. The one under surveillance isn't you, Anna but Sir Philip."

In the past, the Duke had appeared quite displeased when he heard of Sir Philip living

within the castle. It was very rare for his master to reveal his feelings.

Jerome didn't know the details but he could tell that there was something to it so he placed more eyes around Philip to watch him closely.

Jerome's tight surveillance started some time ago, from the moment Philip arrived at the city of Roam. But Jerome did not know that there was another set of eyes monitoring Philip.

They were hidden guards at Damian's side and one of their missions was to block Philip from approaching Damian. Because Damian had returned to Roam, Philip was now under double monitoring.

"I'm not saying that you cannot meet. You also don't have to say what you've talked about. But you cannot allow Sir Philip meet her Grace or mention him to her. I have been instructed to not allow her Grace to learn of Sir Philip's existence." (Jerome)

Anna wanted to ask why. There was many things about this that she couldn't understand but Anna was just a doctor. If the ones above say so, she had to follow.

"If you don't mind us meeting then... Sir Philip is a competent doctor. Is it okay for me to ask for advice on a cure for her Grace?"

Jerome thought about it for a moment.

"If it's just that, then it's fine. But, her Grace can only know it as your treatment."

"...I understand."

As being under surveillance from the ones above was an extremely uncomfortable thought, Anna did not go to find Philip for a few days.

But when she began to think that if Philip were to go on another trip, the day they meet would be in the distant future, she grew nervous. Eventually, she went back to see Philip.

"Anna, welcome."

Philip looked happy to have a guest and his expression was very kind. All the way here, Anna had been full of anxiety.

What kind of person was he that he had to be monitored? Did he commit a great evil?

She was nervous and worried that she might be dragged into this pointlessly but in the face of Philip's hospitality, she felt unnecessarily guilty.

'If he did something evil, then surely he wouldn't just be under surveillance. Sir Philip is a doctor but he's also a baron, therefore it's probably some kind of political issue.'

And so, afterwards, Anna steadily visited Philip. A doctor's knowledge was practically their property so Anna grew to sincerely respect the Philip that taught her freely.

As for Philip, since he was always alone, having a friend that he could have a conversation with made his life much more enjoyable.

He folded his thoughts of leaving soon and spent his time conversing with Anna or sometimes going outside the castle with her and offering their medical services to the poor.

The relationship between the two was very similar to one between a master and his disciple.



After Damian arrived, the serenity in Roam remained the same as usual. Lucia's life did not change either.

During the day, she would take care of the garden and in the evening, she would read books in the study.

Since the Lady of the House was the same as usual, the employees that were a little nervous went back to normal.

Meanwhile, Damian was busy studying hard. He spent the most of the day alone in his room looking through books.

For the boy, the Academy was the only thing that could prove his existence. He could never relax on it.

The boy who had been completely absorbed in his books lifted his head to the sound of knocking coming from his door.

A while after, a servant came in, stood by the door and spoke.

“Young master, dinner is ready.”

“Okay.”

He didn't realize that much time had flown by. Damian close the book without any hesitation and stood up.

He walked out of the room and his steps towards the dining room were light. Twice a day, he had lunch and dinner with the Duchess.

It was just sitting down, facing each other and having a meal but as time passed, Damian began to look forward to this time.

When Damian arrived at the dining room, no one had arrived yet. He sat down and waited for a bit then Lucia came in. Damian quickly got up, took out a chair and helped Lucia into her seat.

“Thank you, Damian.”

Lucia smiled, greeting him and in response, Damian bowed his head slightly then returned to his seat. It was quiet throughout the meal.

There was usually next to no conversation between them as they ate. There were even more times when they didn't utter a single word.

Damian was unlike a child as he was reserved and Lucia was also not the talkative type. However neither Damian nor Lucia felt the silence was uncomfortable.

While they were eating, Damian accidentally dropped his fork and a maid quickly approached to replace it with a new fork. This minor mistake passed smoothly as though nothing had happened.

Damian glanced at the maid that had moved to serve him. He could feel that the attitude of the employees that attended to him were very careful.

It didn't mean that there was an employee that was rude to him before he left for boarding school. Even though people said all sorts of things about his illegitimacy or what not, from the point of view of the employees, he was in a very high position.

However before, they seemed like a sturdy robots that only fulfilled their duties. In comparison to that time, they showed a bit more enthusiasm as they served and complied with his wishes.

Damian knew all about the Duchess' favor and the Duchess did not conceal her goodwill towards him. And since the employees watched and listened as they served them, they acted a lot more careful with Damian.

The amount of time that Damian met the Duchess in a day did not amount to much. Most of the time, he studied then it was meal time and after which they would take a walk.

The Duchess' favor was not excessive and she did not try to stir up his mind or pull it down. As time passed in this manner, Damian's boundaries relaxed.

If Damian was even a little bit older, the door to his heart would have been tightly shut but he was just eight years old. He was a young child that missed affection but had never even learnt what it was.

After dinner, neither of them said a word about going to the garden together for a walk but they naturally began to walk there together.

"You are eagerly studying most of the time, right? I find that admirable." (Lucia)

The tips of Damian's ears grew slightly red.

"That's because... I don't want to lag behind when I return to the Academy."

"You said this wasn't a vacation but an outing, right? Can you go out at any time?"

"You have to receive permission and there is a limit of 30 days per year. I didn't know his Grace wouldn't be here. I have no way of knowing when he will be back so I'm not quite sure if I will be able to return within the 30 day limit."

Damian's expression got a little darker.

The 30 days limit was not going to be a big issue. The Duke would be able to deal with any problems of that sort but the semester would have already flown by.

"Why don't you call him father? Did he say you have to call him that way?"

“...It’s not like that. I just... thought he’d dislike it...”

“Why do you think so? That’s just your presumption. Try calling him father, he definitely would not dislike it.”

“ ... ”

“And Damian, you haven’t called me by my name. Did you think I wouldn’t notice you were deliberately omitting my name? When you call me, will you go, ‘hey’, ‘you there’. You aren’t doing that, are you?”

The red eyes of the boy shook.

“No. I don’t do that...”

“Then you can say it. I call you Damian, don’t I?”

“...Yes... Lucia.”

Damian grew silent then spoke abruptly.

“May I ask you a question?”

“Any time.” (Lucia)

“Don’t you hate me?”

“I don’t hate you.”

Without any pause, Lucia responded lightly, as though it was an everyday conversation.

“Do you think I should hate you?” (Lucia)

“...I think if you must, you should.”

“Where is there such a saying? The feeling of hate hurts one just as much as it hurts one’s enemy. Why would I bother myself with such an unnecessary emotion? I don’t hate you and I don’t have any plans of doing so in the future.”

“ .. ”

But if the Duchess gave birth to a child and he becomes a roadblock in the future of her child, from that moment onwards, her goodwill towards him would change into hatred.

Damian couldn't believe the words of the Duchess.

“Damian, ever since I got married, I've known about you. Your father married me on the condition that I acknowledge you.”

Damian couldn't believe it.

“That man is probably not an affectionate father but don't think that he hates you. He is a man clumsy at expressing himself. If he hated you, he wouldn't have bothered to make you his successor.”

Damian couldn't believe it but he wanted to believe. Nobody'd ever told the boy something like this before.

There was contempt and disapproval towards the crude illegitimate child and faced with the indifference from his father's cold gaze, he'd clenched his teeth and worked harder. So, Lucia's tender comfort squeezed into the gaps in the boy's heart.

“Do you hate your father?”

Hate. He'd never dared to think that way. Damian knew just how much what he had was beyond his means. He was just an illegitimate child with a non-noble biological mother yet he was given recognition by his high ranking noble father and was appointed as his successor.

[Graduate. Then this place is yours.]

The Duke sent Damian to boarding school with only this condition. It was a ridiculously easy condition.

And because of his scary father, even though there were many hateful gazes, nobody tried to harm the boy directly.

Of the Taran bloodline, excluding the Duke, there was only Damian so there were no

competitors. So, harboring complaints was something Damian wouldn't do.

"No. He is... someone I admire."

The boarding school where the boy was attending was a prestigious academy where nobles and those of royal blood gathered from various countries.

Because the school system was personalized for each student, there were students like Damian who boarded long term and while the shortest course of study could be two years, it varied greatly.

There was no one among the people that came from all over the world that did not know of Xenon's Taran Duke. His remarkable prowess in the war that ended not too long ago was more famous in other countries, especially in enemy countries, than in his home country.

Damian had heard that his knights were revered almost like gods. That his father was so great, no one could surpass him.

In the Academy, Damian lived without revealing who his father was, as well as his country of origin. It wasn't that the Duke had asked him to conceal it.

But that Damian was afraid of the gazes that might follow. Gazes that would say, 'Ah, an extraordinary person like that merely has son like this.'

The boy's goal was to safely secure his status as the successor and one day, succeed the Duke.

But he'd never thought about why that is or what he would like to do after he became the Duke. He only feared he would be abandoned if he wasn't useful because his father just needed someone to inherit his title.

Damian never hoped for his father's affection. He was satisfied with even a little recognition.

That way he knew he wasn't completely useless. If he was accommodated that much, then he had nothing more to ask for.

"I see. It is a desirable thing for a son to admire his father." (Lucia)

Lucia seemed to have something pressing down on her chest the entire time. The tragic case of the Taran family was an unpleasant incident and it seems like the relationship between father and son wasn't very good, so she was inwardly worried.

"What part of him do you admire? That he's a great Knight? Or that he's a powerful lord that rules over the vast North?"

"...Because he's strong." (Damian)

It was a statement that sounded like pure nonsense but Lucia agreed. He was correct. To Lucia, it didn't seem like there was anyone under the sky stronger than him.

He was a man that made one want to lean on him, both physically and mentally.

"Yes. He is indeed strong."

Like a colossal tree, standing firm and unyielding; enough to make one want to lean on its base and seek refuge in its shadows.

"Damian, do you wish to become strong?"

"Yes."

"You could be. You are your father's son."

"...Yes."

The wind blew softly, lightly brushing past the two of them. The scent of flowers carried by the wind was so sweet, it filled Damian's heart with pleasure.

There were no words but there was a smile on their faces as they continued to walk. It was another peaceful day.

Chapter 34

Damian (5)

Lucia had rarely gone horseback riding ever since Damian arrived and as she was preparing to once again go riding for a bit, Kate came to visit.

The two greeted each other with a light embrace.

Kate had not been able to visit for a while as she'd been taking care of her injured grand aunt, Countess Corzan.

Perhaps she'd been weakened because of old age for Madam Michelle fell down the stairs and terribly sprained her ankle.

It was to the point where she could barely move so she chose the one she dotted on the most, her niece, Kate, to be her care-taker.

Even though her grandaunt was usually nagging and strict, Kate stayed by her side and took care of her.

"How is Madam Michelle?" (Lucia)

"She's limping a little but she can walk around now. She asked me to tell you she's thankful for the medicine you sent, they've shown great efficiency."

"It's my pleasure to be of help."

At the beginning, Madam Michelle was a frequent visitor to Roam but after Lucia opened tea parties several times and handled her socializing effortlessly, Madam Michelle's visit came to a stop due to her poor health.

And ever since Kate became a frequent visitor, they'd been exchanging words to and from through Kate.

"This is my real purpose of coming to see you today, Lucia."

Kate placed the basket that she came in with on the table.

“It’s the present I promised you last time. Open it.”

Lucia carefully removed the cover of the basket and exclaimed.

“Oh my!”

Suddenly, a blinding bright light came in causing a certain pair of big black eyes to blink. The disheveled baby fox with fluffy light yellow fur shook its big ears.

It was conscious of Lucia’s gaze on it for a short moment then soon enough it yawned and closed its eyes. It moved its bushy tail and wrapped it around its body for cover.

The lovely creature that was small enough to fit into both hands instantly captured Lucia’s heart.

“Goodness! It’s lovely!”

Lucia placed her hand on her chest to pace her thumping heart. She’d gone to the fox hunt and seen the foxes that the ladies raised but none of them was as adorable as the one in front of her.

“It’s also my first time seeing such a beauty. Even when it grows up, it will be beautiful.”
(Kate)

Kate had promised to obtain a fox for Lucia for fox hunting.

“You have to obtain them when they are young to tame them. Look after it frequently, it has to recognize its owner before its growth phase. If this time passes, you can’t give any excuses.”

“I understand.”

“I’ll send you a list of things you need to watch out for when raising a fox later.”

“Thank you, Kate. It’s such a wonderful gift...”

The two women descended into conversation about fox hunting for a while.

“Oh, where is my mind? I was about to go horse-riding. Do you want to join me Kate?”

“I didn’t plan on doing so at first, but I’ve been wanting to go riding for a while. I’ll go.”

“Ah, and I have someone I want to introduce to you.”

Lucia called a maid and instructed her to call Damian.

“Damian is here. He’s home for a change but I’m not sure if there would be another time to introduce him to you.”

“Who...?”

“I’m talking about his Grace the Duke’s son. Well, he’s also my son now.”

Kate’s expression instantly stiffened.

“...What?”

“Could it be you’ve never heard of it? From what I know, the fact that Damian is his successor has already been made public.”

“...ah... well... I’ve heard a little...”

The life of the Duke was a taboo topic amongst northern nobles. It wasn’t like someone ordered them to keep their mouths shut but they knew to be careful with what they said.

It was thanks to the efforts of the Northern people that no rumors of the son and successor of the Taran Duke had spread in the Capital’s noble circles.

Meanwhile the Taran duke didn’t care whether one deliberately spreads a rumor or one watches what they say. In the North, Damian was a fleeting existence.

“You called for me?”

Looking at the black-haired, red-eyed boy that had walked into the drawing room for a while, Kate swallowed tensely. She hadn’t finished preparing her mind.

“Say hello, Damian. This is pretty much the only guest that visits me in Roam. My

friend, Kate Milton.”

Damian looked indifferently at Kate who was unable to hide her puzzlement. He was familiar with such looks and expressions towards himself. He was deluded for a moment due to the innocent goodwill the Duchess had shown to him all this while.

As his mood sank a little, he lowered his head in a nodding manner.

“It is an honor to meet a beautiful lady like yourself, Lady Milton. My name is Damian.”

“Ah... yes. I... I am also honored, Young Lord.”

Kate hadn't ever had such a hard time managing her expression. Even when in the past she was walking around the city and stepped on her dress ripping it, she could manage her expression.

As for the Duchess sitting next to her,

“Wow, your words are so... geez. Who would say you aren't your father's son?”

After saying so, she burst into laughter. It was a feeling of seeing a comedy and she couldn't help but laugh.

“Do you know how to ride a horse, Damian? Or shall I bring a colt?”

“I know how to ride a horse. I learned at the Academy.”

“Seems like there's nothing you can't do. Kate, he's marvelous, isn't he? He's only eight but he knows how to ride a horse.”

“Ah... yes. It's... great.”

It was definitely not common for an eight year old to know how to properly ride a horse but it was very possible for someone of the young Lord's huge stature as he exceeded that of the usual eight year old.

Moreover, he was the son of the Taran Duke whose name was hailed among Knights.

However, Kate didn't have any intention of diminishing Lucia's feeling of pride so she just humored her.

“Damian, we were going to go horseback riding now but we can all go together.”

Damian took a glance at Kate’s stiffening expression. He tried to laugh but it was a sign that told him he was an unwelcome guest.

“No, it’s okay. I still have books I have to read.”

“While studying is good, you can’t keep studying all the time, especially when you’re at the prime of your age. Don’t you want to grow bigger?”

Big. Damian flinched at the sensitive topic.

“You have to grow as big as your father, right?”

Damian nodded his head.

“Kate, would it be okay if Damian joins us? Sorry I didn’t ask for consent beforehand.”

“No... It’s fine. But Lucia, the horse-riding field we’re going to... only women can enter.”

“I know.”

Lucia tilted her head as though asking ‘What’s the problem?’

“Damian is just eight years old. He’s not a man.”



It was only for an instant but Kate witnessed the distorted expression of the young Lord of Taran.

The boy that looked unlike his eight-year-old age with his upright and huge build, suddenly seemed his age when he heard those straightforward words.

Kate turned her head away slightly and let out a small laugh. She felt a bit sorry for the boy’s broken pride.

In the horse-riding field, when the noble ladies came up to greet Lucia, she had them greet Damian.

The noble ladies were as though they'd all bitten an unripe fruit for they all had sour expressions as they begrudgingly gave their greetings.

Some looked at Lucia unable to understand it at all, some looked at her with gazes that said she was too young to know about the world while some looked at her with worried gazes.

Lucia was indifferent to their gazes and acted as though she didn't notice them. From time to time, Damian gave Lucia a peculiar gaze.

"This child is Emily."

Lucia introduced her favorite horse to Damian. Damian took in its entire appearance and so as to not surprise it, he walked slowly to its front then stroked its back.

"It's a good horse." (Damian)

"You know how to discern horses?"

"I only know how to tell if it's a good horse or not. I'm not an expert."

"But I don't know how to do even that. To me, because Emily is my horse, she's the prettiest but all horses look the same to me. Kate, isn't it great? Damian is very young but he knows a lot."

Looking at the face of the Duchess that was filled with joy and pride, Kate simply chimed in with a smile. She sneaked a glance at the young Lord who was embarrassed and had turned his head seemingly occupied with other things.

At first, Kate couldn't understand why Lucia was like this but eventually decide to just accept it since it wasn't a bad thing for their mother-son relationship to get better.

After a few rounds of circling around the riding field, they ended their light session of horse riding and the two women went into the lounge (break room). As Damian had opted to keep riding, he was still outside on the field.

Every table in the lounge was filled with women, seated in groups of twos and threes. Unlike the original intention for building it, the lounge of the horse-riding field had increasingly become an active social gathering spot for women.

“People’s gazes on Damian were much colder than I expected.” (Lucia)

Kate was unsure of what reply to give so she just listened.

“Even though he’s the successor that his Grace the Duke personally chose, why are they like that?”

“That’s... probably because of the unwritten rules. Although the law states that a son would be recognized as a qualifier once they enter the family register, in reality, there are next to no cases where a son that enters the registry like that inherits the title. The ones that become Counts are barely a handful and there’s been no precedence where they’re titled higher than Marquis.”

“I see. I didn’t know that.”

In Lucia’s dream, she didn’t have any children so when she lived as the Countess, she didn’t pay attention to matters concerning succession.

“Then what happens if an official has no children apart from the child that was entered into the registry?”

“Most people adopt a son from among their relatives.”

It was the so-called noble pride.

It is said that an illegitimate child should be extremely grateful to even be recognized as a qualifier. Although Lucia was of the royal family, looking closer, she was also an illegitimate child so it left a bad taste in Kate’s mouth.

An elderly noble woman walked up to Kate and Lucia’s table. She was Countess Philia, a woman extremely healthy for her age and not inferior to anyone in her enjoyment of horse riding.

Lucia remembered hearing that when the women-only equestrian(horseback riding) practice field was created, the Countess had praised the Taran Duke till her mouth ran dry.

They went through the usual ceremonial motions of greeting each other and sending their best regards then the Countess placed two flower baskets on the table.

“I got a granddaughter just recently and it is a northern tradition to present yellow flowers to people around me as I wish for my granddaughter to be healthy and to grow up beautifully.”

“Oh my, Congratulations. Your granddaughter will grow up beautifully and healthy just like the Countess.”

When the Countess turned around to hand out flower baskets to other people, Kate spoke.

“It is a northern tradition but these days there aren’t many people that do it. Countess Philia seems quite trusting of this tradition. It is indeed correct to give out yellow flowers but... it isn’t common to give out this flower... its prices are tremendous. Countess Philia looks very happy, she must have spent a fortune.”

Lucia glanced at the flower basket and smiled ambiguously. The beautiful yellow roses looked as though they were flaunting their elegance.



The employees were lined up outside as usual to welcome the Lady of the House as she returned from her outing to the horse-riding field.

The door of the carriage opened and Lucia stepped down from the carriage. When Jerome discovered the basket of yellow roses in her hands, he grew frightened.

“Kkuk!”

Jerome let out a strange sound in spite of himself but was quick to cover it up by dryly clearing his throat. The employees that noticed it acted like they didn’t hear anything.

Lucia gave him an odd look then held out her basket of flowers.

“Countess Philia said she’d gotten a granddaughter and gave me a present.”

“Ah, yes...”

After accepting the basket of flowers, Jerome heaved a long sigh. He didn’t want to see yellow roses anymore.

Lucia and Damian sat face to face in the receiving room, drinking tea while Jerome stood at the side, waiting on them with more tea.

“Now that I think about it, there are no roses in the garden. I’m thinking of making a rose garden next spring, what are your thoughts, Jerome?”

Jerome’s expression froze.

“About roses... can you think over it again...?”

“Why?”

“Master doesn’t... particularly like them.”

Lucia’s eyes grew round as she looked at Jerome then she spoke to Damian.

“Damian, tell me honestly. Did you know that there were no roses in the garden?”

“I didn’t know.”

“See? Jerome, unless a man is particularly interested in flowers, he wouldn’t really know that. I doubt if my husband is able to differentiate between varieties of flowers. Although I’m sure there’s one flower he can distinguish. Yellow...”

“K-hm. K-hm.”

Jerome overdramatically cleared his throat causing a small laugh to escape from Lucia’s mouth.

“Don’t worry, even if I plant roses, I’ll exclude that color.”

The color itself wasn’t the problem but the Duke had ordered that he didn’t want to lay his eyes on any roses. This was serious. Jerome’s back broke out in cold sweat.

Damian returned to his room and Jerome finally said what he’d been hesitant to say for a while.

“Milady, about the yellow rose I talked to you about the other day. You asked me who the last recipient was, right?”

“Yes, I did. I remember.”

“Under Master’s orders, I sent a yellow rose to the Countess of Falcon.”

Jerome became nervous when she didn’t say anything in reply.

‘I said something useless! What if I offended her?’

“Why so suddenly? They must’ve met?” (Lucia)

“No!! Absolutely not. I informed his Grace that Milady was curious about it and... he asked me to send it.”

“I see.”

Lucia’s expression was indifferent and she replied as though it was a trivial matter. Jerome grew restless as he tried to comprehend, even if it was just a little bit, the feelings of his Mistress.

Lucia really did think it was a trivial matter. Was her husband taking care of an old lover so great that she had to jump up in joy about it? However, Lucia felt as though something had been lifted off her chest and her heart grew soft.

The longing that had been satisfied in the meantime thanks to Damian once again rose up in her heart.

‘When are you coming back? I want to see you... ’

One month after leaving to subjugate barbarians, the Lord of Roam who’d been away from his seat returned.

Chapter 35

Damian (6)

The time struck midnight. Unlike how he was usually, the Duke reeked with the strong smell of blood.

Due to the murderous atmosphere surrounding his master and the smell of blood, Jerome was frightened for a moment then he masked his expression.

“Milady is asleep and the young master had arrived. There’s nothing else of particular importance that needs to be reported.”

Jerome gave a brief report of what his master mostly wanted to know. Hugo simply nodded at him, turned around and walked away. As Jerome watched the further moving back of his master, he once again ordered a maid to prepare a bath for his master.

After which he turned around quietly and quickly chased after the group of Knights that were leaving the castle.

“Sir Heba!”

One of the Knights stopped walking and waited until Jerome had reached him.

“What’s wrong?” (Sir Heba)

Dean wondered quizzically as he looked at Jerome who seemed somewhat serious.

“Did something happen? The Lord doesn’t usually return covered in blood...”

“Ah, we met a group of thieves on our way back.”

“Thieves in the vicinity? I don’t think the security here is that lousy...”

“Tell me about it, I don’t know where they came from but they were robbing nearby peddlers and the Lord discovered it.”

“...I see. Did his Grace personally punish them? It seems they weren’t usual robbers.”

Instead of replying, Dean gave a wry smile. They weren’t professional robbers. It was unfortunate for those roaming beggars that were trying to steal and were caught.

Punishment? The Lord didn’t ask of their crimes. He just blew their throats off on the spot. Thanks to that, the peddlers that were able to escape from their robbers were much more afraid than they were grateful.

Through they were robbers, among them were young men that had not yet reached maturity but the Duke didn’t tolerate such charity. Rather than call it a punishment, it was more of a slaughter.

Dean would think that he’d gotten used to it but every time he witnessed the cruelty of the Duke, he would recoil. Just like today.

“So, you’re saying nothing else happened?”

“Yes. Pretty much.”

Dean shrugged. Apart from the death of a few thieves, there wasn’t much else that needed to be mentioned.

“When he was subduing barbarians, did his mood seem foul or...?”

When they were subduing barbarians, the manner in which the Lord killed them off was extremely cruel. It was on an entirely different level from the way he killed enemies in the past war.

Only the seasoned knights that accompanied him to subdue barbarians were able to see this side of him. It was not a situation that could easily be described with ‘he was in a bad mood’ or what not.

Dean was unable to put it in words so he just shook his head.

“I understand. It must have been a tiring journey. Please rest.” (Jerome)

“I will. Farewell”



Hugo spent a lot of time soaking in the bathtub as though to wash off the pungent smell of blood. However, the sickening bloody smell under his nose still didn't disappear.

Before, such things had never bothered him but when he saw Jerome's hesitant-to-draw-closer face, the face of his wife came to mind.

When he imagined her seeing him and stepping back in fear, his heart sank.

'I don't want to show this to her.'

The moment he reached that conclusion, the feeling of blood that he'd never felt anything wrong with before suddenly felt disgusting.

'An Honorable Noble? A Mighty Knight? What rubbish.'

When he stripped off his shell, he was no more than a hunter. A slaughterer that hunted humans.

Hugo knew of the madness that flowed within his blood. It was tenacious as it urged him into that madness, for it wished to see rivers of blood.

If it weren't for the past war, he would have probably become a notorious murderer. The dull feeling of a person's neck flying off filled him with thrill, the smell of blood gave him a sense of liberation.

Even when he could see the desperation in the eyes of the people as they faced death, he didn't feel any sort of guilt. He'd never had any nightmares either.

For generations, the Master of Taran was a mighty knight and a brilliant Lord. The Taran lineage had a special blood that passed down superior physical abilities and intellect to their descendants hence why the Taran family was obsessed with preserving the purity of their bloodline.

According to the words of Philip, Hugo was a successful product. However, he'd never felt proud of that fact.

[This cursed blood. I will gladly end it here.]

Although he performing solemnly at his conferment ceremony, inwardly, Hugo was grinding his teeth.

He wanted to trample the cursed Taran bloodline and not leave any traces. He wanted to revel in delight as those dead ancestors of his ran amok in hell with anger.

‘If only that old geezer didn’t come with Damian.’

When Philip appeared with Damian, Hugo’s resolve to end his own lineage became all for naught.



After Hugo was done with his bath, he walked to his bedroom then stood holding the door knob. After worrying for a while, he turned around and walked to his wife’s bedroom. After entering, it didn’t take long for his eyes to adjust to the darkness in her bedroom.

He walked to the bed and for a while, he stood, watching her sleeping figure on the bed. Although he was just looking at her, his heart felt somewhat strange.

It was as though his heart was sick for it because somehow, he found it difficult to just keep watching her.

He lifted up the blanket and slid in beside her. He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her soft body into his arms.

He then buried his nose in her neck, breathing in her fruit-like fragrance. He closed his eyes and after a while, he could feel his sharpened nerves calm down.

Within Hugo, there were two sides that existed. The reason he could return to being the Taran Duke as though nothing happened after he’d hunted and soaked himself with the blood of humans was because he’d separated himself into two.

Perhaps a normal person would have gone insane but Hugo’s spirit was abnormally strong and tenacious.

However, it took more time in order for him to fully return to being Duke Hugo after becoming Hunter Hugo than when it was the opposite way around. He needed more

time to calm down the madness in his blood as it got excited by slaughter.

Surprisingly, this time, perhaps because of the warmth in his arms, he was calming down much faster than usual.

Now that the excitement from slaughter had subsided, the heat in his lower abdomen began to spread throughout his body. At first, he'd just wanted to embrace her and fall asleep however after feeling her warm temperature, her soft skin and breathing her in, he couldn't stand it anymore.

'I'll feel just a little bit... '

He slipped his hands inside her nightwear as he kissed her neck then he carefully squeezed her breast, watching for her reaction.

'Will she wake up?'

Betraying his expectations, she was still fast asleep.

'Why is she such a heavy sleeper?'

He grumbled. Her husband had been away for a long time and just returned, kissing and touching her yet she stayed asleep. He was dissatisfied. He refused to hold back anymore.

He sat up on the bed and kicked the blanket covering her to the ground. He lowered himself to her legs, lifted up her slender ankle and kissed the tip of her foot.

He put her small foot into his mouth, licking it with his tongue then sucked and rolled his tongue around it like candy.

He kissed and licked her ankle then moved his lips to her calf, sucking on it before giving it a light bite and kissing it.

He didn't know if she was going to wake up even with all these caresses. He usually had a lot of work so he would retire late to the bedroom and sometimes he would wake her up after she slept off first.

She usually would have woken up at this point but today, it seemed like she was in a remarkably deep sleep.

However, seeing her like this only triggered his obstinacy. He lifted his hands to her waist and stripped off her petite lace panties.

He then grabbed her thighs and spread them apart causing the mouth of her bashfully concealed petal to open slightly. His lower abdomen began to throb at this sight causing him to frown.

He had to suppress his throbbing member that was begging to enter.

He lowered his lips to the pale, tender flesh of her thighs, suckling till he made a mark. As he looked at the red hickey, he gave a smile of satisfaction.

Because it wasn't in an easily discoverable location, she wouldn't be able say anything.

'When would she find this mark?'

He really wanted to see her expression the moment she did. She would probably panic. Her face would go red and she wouldn't know what to do.

He looked up again only to find her still fast asleep.

"Sleeping so well you wouldn't even know when you're carried away."

'Let's see how far you can endure.'

He lowered his head again, kissing her hot spring that was hidden within her forest. He licked, suckled, swallowed and repeatedly swirled his tongue around it then slipped the tip of his tongue into her slightly open entrance.

As he licked her tender flesh and continuously ravaged her insides with his tongue, her dry spring began to flow.



Lucia awakened to the feeling of a strange heat spreading through her lower regions. In her half-asleep, half-awake state, she felt an external stimulus exciting the sensitive junction between her thighs.

Before she could grasp the situation, she felt an intense stimulation travel through her as something plunge inside of her.

“Hk!”

Both of her legs were held firmly apart and her most delicate part between her legs was being sucked up. She managed to lift her head and look down only to find his head buried between her legs.

Lucia forced her still asleep brain to function.

‘Is he back? Since when?’

However, she wasn’t able to contemplate for long. His pointy tongue touched her petite vaginal entrance and pierced into her. A tingling sensation travelled up her spine.

Lucia shuddered as though stuck by lightning and couldn’t help but utter a cry.

“Ah!”

His tongue wasn’t as hard as his fingers but it was a lot more accurate. Lucia felt intense excitement from the unseen stimulation. She grabbed the sheets tightly and her head trembled as she moaned.

Her waist swayed and she tried to close her thighs but he held her legs firmly apart so it didn’t turn out as she wished. He spread her legs strongly and violated her insides with his tongue.

He sucked intensely on her drooling entrance like it was an oasis in a desert. He tasted her soft and moist inner flesh then explored deeper with his tongue, exciting her and enjoying her reactions.

As fluids gushed from her oasis, a thick smell spread out and he could see that she was fully awake. He fondled the small protrusion on her center with his tip of his tongue then poked and prodded before finally lightly biting down on it.

“Hk! Ah! Ang!”

Her small moans transformed into passionate cries. Until those cries turned to sobs, he did not take his lips off her vagina. He kissed, licked, suckled and swallowed.

He couldn’t stop himself savoring from the odd flavor and aroma of her body fluids. He sucked as though to swallow her aroused fleshy mound and in response, her waist

shook excitedly in the air then flopped down.

Hugo licked from her lower abdomen and traveled all the way to her breasts. Her eyes were unfocused as they blankly stared at him.

It was a pity. If only the surroundings were a bit brighter then he would have been able to see her flushed appearance.

He wove his hands into her negligee and squeezed her chest. He grabbed her soft and tender breasts with his palms that were coarse from wielding the sword.

Her skin felt as smooth as the finest silk and every time he touched her he felt good. Whether it was her face that was without the slightest blemish or her milky teeth that had no defects.

The fact that only him, her husband would be able to feel and see such a sight satisfied his possessiveness.

He lowered his head and took a mouthful of the appetizing fruit in front of him. Stimulated by his caresses, her nipple stood firmly as it was fondled and swallowed by the anxious tongue.

She gave off a delicious fragrance. It was such a captivating smell that if he could, he'd swallow it all.

As he listened to her gasping and moaning sounds, he couldn't help but admired how he was able to hold back and endure all this while.

From the first day of the hunt, he suffered from an overpowering sense of hunger (desire) and thirst. No matter how much he hunted barbarians, he was not satisfied.

[Whatever, I don't give a damn.]

He tried to break off the string that had tied up his heart. Wavering? So what if I waver?

He alone was intoxicated with her and didn't know what to do and she'd never tried to make him waver.

He reached out with one hand and spread her closed thighs apart. His member had hardened to the extent that it ached and was begging to be released.

He took a place between her legs and quickly lifted her weight. In a single thrust, he penetrated into her without any hindrances, hitting deep into her womb.

Her body flinched slightly as it accepted the intruder.

“Ah!”

“Haa...”

His hand supported her body while his other hand on the bed squeezed the sheets of the bed tightly. A grunting moan flowed out of his mouth.

This was it. Her slippery insides wrapped perfectly around his manhood as they squeezed. Their point of union fit tightly without any gaps.

As he burrowed his desire into her warm and wet insides, he was filled with a sense of perfect satisfaction. Her breasts under him bounced up and down with the little movements he made.

Her pink nipples, wet from his saliva and her glossy fair chest were littered with marks from him. Her taste that had been in his mouth till now still excited him.

He flicked her nipple with his tongue then licked it softly. He fondled and played with it a few times then took the whole thing into his mouth.

“Ung... Aah!”

He teasingly chewed on it before sucking with great force. He loosely rolled his tongue around it, lightly bit it then repeatedly suckled strongly.

Her body shuddered in excitement as she released a small moan and her inner walls clamped down on him tightly. Although it was good to taste her soft breasts, he couldn't stay still anymore.

“Lift your waist.”

Only the end of his sentence flowed into her ears. Lucia who'd been moaning due to his persistent caresses felt thrill at the vague sound of his deep voice.

Vividly remembering his movements when he'd thrust deeply into her, her insides

throbbed and squeezed at him.

Lucia watched as a suppressed groan left his mouth and her mouth felt dry. Her heart grew desperate and she reached out, grabbing his hand that was next to her while placing her other hand under the pillow then she wrapped both of her legs around his waist.

Hugo grabbed her buttocks, moved closer on his knees and lifted her waist into the air. He pulled out from her anxiously soaked inner walls and heavily drove his searing hot member deep into her.

“Huuu...”

Maybe because it had been a while, she felt that his thing was much bigger. It completely filled up her body as it entered and she felt like she couldn't breathe.

She put more force into her hands, clenching tightly on his hands and when he saw the slight grimace on her face, he spoke.

“Slowly?”

Lucia pursed her lips and nodded her head. He slipped out then slowly moved his waist as he re-entered. The feeling of his desire hitting her deepest spot was numbing and she let out a moan-like sigh.

“Ah... hng.”

His firm member repeatedly penetrated her, heating up her insides. Deeply and at times, shallowly. As his movement to control the intensity continued, her tender, relaxed insides tightened and swallowed him.

“Haa... Really...”

He muttered with a murky subdued voice.

“Your insides are practically devouring me.”

As she drew closer to her climax, her tight squeeze on him began to lessen. He couldn't hold back his impulse to rampage deeper inside of her. He felt good when he put it inside of her but when he began to move, the feeling was amazing.

The movement of his waist quickly increased in speed, plunging deeper without reserve.

“A-! Aah!”

Her body shook in accordance with his movements, swaying rhythmically with each thrust. Her body twisted and twitched as she mewled in pleasure.

When he slowly pulled outwards, it felt like her insides were pulling away with him and when he thrust hard, the heavy force caused her body to tingle.

He lowered his head to kiss her wet eyelashes then he moved to her earlobes, licking and biting then he whispered.

“Do you know your expression right now... is a little crazy?”

He held her waist firmly so she wouldn't move up to the head of the bed and thrust powerfully. Every time he rammed into her, her eyes glistened and flickered and his rough breathing echoed in her ears.

“You look like you're about to cry but... your insides won't let me go... ha... hng... this... do you like it? Does it feel good?”

“Ah! Ang!”

“Tell me, do you want me to go deeper? Does you like when I put it this way?”

He didn't feel embarrassed by his teasing words. Just like he'd said, her insides were actively sucking and wrapping around him. Her sensitive inner walls moved with him as though attached to his penis and the movement excited her immensely.

“A-! Hugh! Too-! Hng!”

The stimulation was too intense. She felt short of air as though she was falling from an incredible height. His hard penis ravaged her vigorously and when he moved outwards, she felt like she was losing her mind.

As though to split her into two, his heated shaft repeatedly thrust in and out of her. And every time her deep inner flesh was prodded and rubbed, she screamed at the pleasure that filled her brain.

Her body twitched and gasped at his seemingly never-ending thrusts.

“Haa-! Aak!”

Reaching her climax, Lucia lowered her head and screamed seductively. As her inner walls viciously clamped down on him, a wild roar burst forth from within him. She spasmed in pleasure and he continued to burrow into her.

“Hng... ng... Hugh... just... a sec... a moment...”

Lucia teared up from the intense stimulation. She wanted him to pause for a moment but it seemed as though her pleas had excited him as his movements grew fiercer.

His hip muscles contracted and relaxed as he frantically thrust into her. Her legs that were wrapped around his waist seemingly lost power as they slipped off his waist.

He grabbed both of her legs and drew her closer to him then he lifted her buttocks and plunged even deeper inside her. After several attempts, he held her ankles side-by-side in one hand then his stiff enthusiasm entered her narrow entrance, repeatedly advancing and retreating.

“Uue-! Hk!”

It was exhausting. But it felt good. His powerful force as he penetrated her, his passionate movements as though he wanted to eat her up, his muscular movements that she could make out through her blurry eyes, his low moans that slipped out intermittently too, she liked them all and they excited her.

Her body had learnt the joy of a union with a man. Her buds blossomed, her petals grew and as time flew by, she was in full bloom. Her ecstatic body was open to the one she loved.

As the wall that she'd built against him disappeared completely, her body reacted more actively to his coupling. Her body sensed his body and instinctively reacted to him and this change was driving him crazy.

He let her legs fall to one side and grabbing her behind, he penetrated her slowly. As he was enraptured by the churning of her tender insides, she closed her eyes and gasped for breath.

Whenever his moving penis hit and stimulated a sensitive spot, her forehead would wrinkle slightly.

He once again grabbed her ankles and positioned them upwards then began to burrow deeply into her vagina. Again, her body trembled greatly and she uttered a cry of pleasure.

Her lingering hand on his shoulders felt as though it would slip so she clasped down firmly with her fingers. The painful sensation of her fingernails digging into his shoulders as she held on with all her might infused more heat into his underbelly.

“Hng!”

“...Ku-!”

His body stiffened momentarily as he released deep inside her womb. Lucia felt a hot fluid spreading and filling up her insides and she shut her eyes. Her vaginal walls clenched and squeezed him tightly.

His arms shook and a growl escaped his throat while her body twitched and spasmed with pleasure.

“Hha... Hha...”

His weight came down on her as he stopped to catch his breath. He wasn’t completely leaning on her as he held some of his weight with his elbow but his body moderately pressing down on her gave her a pleasant feeling of comfort.

Lucia placed her shivering hand on his head and the sensation of running her hand through his slightly wet hair felt good.

Chapter 36

Damian (7)

In the quiet bedroom, only the sound of two people breathing could be heard. Lucia's breathing was calming down to an even pace and Hugo lowered his head, turned her body sideways then wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her into his arms.

He simply embraced her for a while then he began to cover her lips, eyes and forehead with kisses.

"Ha-ha, that's ticklish." [Lucia]

"Shall I make it not ticklish?"

Hugo whispered softly then bit her neck. His hand stealthily slipped from her back to her waist but Lucia twisted her body and naturally pushed his hand away.

When the smooth sensation of her skin disappeared from his palm, he reached out stubbornly and grabbed her buttocks. This time, Lucia pushed away from his chest.

"We can't. I have a lot to do so I have to get up early tomorrow morning."

"What do you have to do?"

"I'm planning to have a garden party in three days and since it's a situation where I show my garden to people, I want to increase the scale a bit. So, from tomorrow, I have to organize the garden, prepare it and of course, there are a lot of other things I have to take care of."

'She was completely fine even though I wasn't around.'

He grumbled inwardly.

"A garden party? The days are starting to get colder, are there still flowers?"

"There are autumn flowers. Although they aren't as bright as spring's or summer's, I

wanted to have a garden party before the year is over.”

“So, your party is more important than your husband that just came back. Which one is your priority?”

Again, his hands stealthily slid to her waist and his lips glued themselves to her neck. Lucia smacked his shoulders.

“Don’t be unreasonable. Do you know how childish you sound?”

“Oh-ho. Now you’re beating your husband?”

Lucia teasingly booed as his attempt to act tough. Hugo’s eyes strangely lit up then with huge motions, he pounced at her but Lucia’s small body quickly rolled away and avoided him.

There were bursts of laughter blended with small screams and the bed quickly became a mess with the two of them tossing and turning all over.

Soon enough, Lucia grew breathless and began to pant then was firmly caught by him. That she was able to avoid him even once on the narrow bed meant he was going easy on her or it would have been impossible.

He hugged her from behind, slid his legs between hers, then placed one hand on her chest as he kissed her back. Lucia tried to move but found she was held firmly in place so she gave up. Although his hands kept fondling her breasts, she left him alone.

“Did your assignment with your vassals go well?”

“Mhm. What of you? What have you been doing?”

“Nothing mu... ah, no, they is something. Damian came back.”

Just for an instant, his body stiffened. As Lucia was wrapped in his embrace, she could feel it.

“...I know.” (Hugo)

What did Damian mean to him? Lucia had a lot of things that she wanted to ask but she decided to take it slow and wait for when they could sit down and have a long

conversation.

Since even Jerome was treasuring his words, she didn't want to approach it prematurely. All this while, she'd been interacting with Damian and could tell that the boy did not resent his father.

It wouldn't have been strange if the boy's sense of shame over his situation and illegitimacy twisted his emotions but Damian turned out to be an honest and innocent child.

If she had a son like Damian, even if he wasn't a child she gave birth to, she would put all her effort into raising him.

Now, she wanted to know how he thought of Damian. If they didn't have any animosity towards each other, it was be a pity for them to keep having such a frigid relationship.

Was the relationship between them only the fact that they shared the same blood?

Lucia believed that even though it wasn't as intense as the love between a man and a woman, the love between blood ties was bound with a string that was not easily broken.

"What do you think? Lunch? If possible, let's have a meal together."

Although Lucia spoke like it wasn't a big deal, inwardly she worried about what to do if he rejected. If he didn't even want to eat with the boy, then it was the worst possible situation.

"Let's do dinner, I have a meeting in the morning."

Fortunately, his answer was positive. Lucia gave a little sigh of relief.

"Was there any rudeness?" (Hugo)

Lucia thought about it briefly then realized the subject of his words was Damian but she couldn't help but think, 'ah, he doesn't really know his son.' If he knew Damian, even a little bit, he wouldn't ask that question.

"Not at all. He was very polite and mature and his attitude and manners were not out of place. I'll co-exist fine with Damian, you don't have to worry about tha-"

“I’m not worried about that. Just tell me if he’s ever impolite to you.”

Behind his back, Lucia’s eyes narrowed as she listened to his tone that sounded like an officer talking about a recruit.

“What would you do?”

“Advise him.”

However, Hugo’s type was advice was never one from the mouth.

“That won’t happen. While you weren’t here, we’ve gotten along very well...”

Her voice was getting increasingly drowsy.

“...We?” (Hugo)

The lingering question was not heard by Lucia’s ear that had fallen asleep.

“Ah... my greetings... are late... Welcome back...” (Lucia)

He kissed her lips close to the end of her mumblings. Not long after, Lucia fell asleep, her breathing calm and even.

“I’m back.”

Once again, he lightly kissed her lips, then closed his eyes to sleep.



When Lucia woke up in the morning, she was alone. His waking hours were quite early so she’d grown accustomed to waking up alone.

The lingering sensation in her body told her that last night was not a dream. It had been a long time since they’d united so she had no strength in her body. She had to use her arms to support her body upright.

“Ah...”

After she stood up, his viscous body fluids flowed out from between her thighs. No

matter how many time she'd experienced this, Lucia covered her face out of embarrassment.

When she calmed down, she called the maid and ordered for a bath to be prepared. The maids waited on Lucia as she entered the bath full of warm water.

Her dazzling skin that was enhanced by the bright morning sun was littered with red marks. The maids kept glancing at those red traces and their faces grew flushed.

Their master returned late last night and no one could catch a glimpse of him but now they knew he went to their Mistress' room. It was almost certain that after the bath, this rumor would spread among the maids.

"Is he in the office?" (Lucia)

"His Grace is in a meeting."

"Already?"

"His Grace suddenly issued a summon before sunrise."

He was a really energetic man. The ones that works below him could only suffer. To him, as soon as he'd returned to the castle, having a meeting was only a natural procedure. Even though he did the most work, he was the most energetic.

Lucia's face reddened as the events from the previous night floated to the top of her mind. She was happy to see him again and glad that he still wanted her as passionately. Her mood became as light as petals floating on water.



It was the first dinner together for the three people that had become family. Damian was the first to arrive at the dining room and sat waiting. When Lucia arrived, he got up and helped her into her seat as usual.

"Damian, have you seen your father?"

"I have not yet sent my greetings. His Grace was continuously occupied."

"You're right. He seems very busy today."

Lucia pouted slightly as she replied.

‘No matter how busy he is, calling the boy in for a short greeting wouldn’t be too hard. Now look, this meal ends up being the first time they meet.’

Really, he was so inconsiderate. It was really admirable that Damian managed to grow so big without having a twisted mind.

Lucia had also been busy today and the fact that she was unable to have lunch with Damian as usual was constantly on her mind.

“What did you do for lunch? You didn’t skip it, did you? I had a lot of work today and couldn’t pay attention.”

“I ate and I know that you’re busy preparing for your party.”

After a while, Hugo arrived. His gaze fell on Damian, pausing on the boy for a little while then he sat down.

Without a simple word of greeting, the first family meal began. In the suffocatingly quiet dining room, Lucia proceeded to alternate glances between father and son.

‘Both of them are quite extreme.’

She didn’t expect an amicable, friendly relationship and Lucia didn’t know that ever since Damian went to boarding school, they hadn’t seen each other but even so it was obvious that this identical pair of father and son had not seen each other in a long time yet their eyes didn’t even meet.

‘Damian said he admires his father and... he wouldn’t have made Damian his successor if he hated him...’

The dreary atmosphere between the two was as cold as the weather but Lucia had no idea what to do so she decided to not worry about it.

The atmosphere between them wasn’t murderous or threatening and Lucia didn’t have any problems with either of them so the thought that it was serious didn’t occur to her.

‘It will probably be better if I am in the middle.’

Lucia didn't think that a relationship like this could be changed overnight. If one tries to forcefully improve a relationship, the side effects could be huge.

When Damian returns to boarding school, the memory of his time here would remain a good one and if Hugo became more conscious of his son than before, that would be good too. For now, she would consider that as the first step.

'Although... it's really nice to see them side by side.'

It felt as though there was a big Hugo and a small Hugo together. Just looking at the two of them made her feel content. Meanwhile, the employees felt the the Lady of the House was incredible to eat calmly in such a suffocating atmosphere.

"Is the preparation for the garden party going well?"

Hugo asked a few moments after they had finished dining.

"Yes, it's going smoothly. And about that, I have something to tell you. I was thinking about having Damian attend, what do you think?"

Damian who was drinking water made a small choking sound. Hugo glanced sideways at Damian then moved his gaze to Lucia.

"Isn't it a party for women?"

"But Damian isn't a man, he's just 8 years old."

For a moment, there was silence then Hugo let out a small laugh while Damian's ears flushed red.

"As you say, Damian is not a man. Do as you please."

"Damian, what do you think?"

"I-!"

Damian suddenly opened his mouth but when Hugo's calm gaze moved to him, he shut his mouth and lowered his head.

"...Yes. I will do so."

‘Wow.’ (Lucia)

Lucia could feel the absolute power difference between father and son. Sometimes, Damian was so mature it was hard to believe he was just eight years old.

With his huge, sturdy build, his stiff but polite manner of speaking and his vocabulary that was on the level of an adult, one could barely see the signs that he was a child.

Lucia tried to remember her childhood as an eight year old but found she could barely even remember. Perhaps she had spent her time playing with the other children in the neighborhood.

But beside Hugo, Damian became a cub lion. In comparison, Hugo was the lion king, seated on the highest throne and looking down below. It seemed as though even if Hugo’s giant paw pressed down on him, Damian wouldn’t even make a sound.

‘It’s a good thing for a son to admire their father but they could also have difficulties to some extent.’

Lucia’s mood improved when she began to think that there was some possibility for improvement in their relationship.

‘The great lion king and his cub lion... now that I think about it, the banner for the Taran family is a black lion. How fitting.’

“Did you have something planned after the meal?” (Hugo)

“Nothing special, I wanted to go to the study and read a book.” (Lucia)

“Is it a book you have to read today?”

“Not really. Are we having guests?”

“At this time? There’s no need to attend to such rude guests.”

“Then...?”

“Take a light stroll to digest your meal and take a bath.”

“...What?”

"I'm saying if you want to wake up early tomorrow, you have to retire to bed early."

As Lucia looked at Hugo, her face gradually became red.

'So someone's face can get this red.'

Damian thought with an expressionless face.

"...what the hell are you saying in front of the child?"

Lucia's face was crimson and she spoke in hushed tones. Seeing Lucia this way, Hugo couldn't help but chuckle.

"What did I say?" (Hugo)

"You-!"

Lucia glared at him then stood up. Hugo called after her as she walked away.

"Where are you going?"

"Going for a walk!"

Her footsteps thudded as she rushed out of the hall with huge strides.

Damian stared blankly at her departing back. The boy could not understand the situation itself.

What part of that conversation caused Lucia to have such an excessive reaction? The smart boy couldn't figure it out at all.

As the boy was mulling over it in his head, he heard the sound of a small laugh and turned his head in that direction, only to see the Duke laughing quite pleasantly.

The boy had seen the Duke's cold smile or his ridiculing smile but it was his first time seeing the Duke laughing like this.

It was fascinating to see and at the same time, shocking. His father that was as fierce as a sword suddenly seemed human.

After a while, Lucia came back into the dining room.

“Damian, let’s go together.”

Damian glanced sideways at the Duke then stood up and followed after Lucia. The suddenly alone Hugo’s expression didn’t look so good.

The word she’d said the previous night.

‘We.’

He began to worry over that word. He recalled her appearance as she called for Damian without any inhibitions or hesitation and it seemed like the two of them had grown pretty friendly while he was gone.

It wasn’t as though he wanted them to have a terrible relationship but for some reason, he didn’t quite like it.

Chapter 37

Damian (8)

As they walked through the garden, Damian continuously stole glances at Lucia.

“Is there something you want to say?”

“It’s kind of... amazing. You aren’t afraid of his Grace...”

“Is there any wife that’s afraid of her husband? Damian, when you grow up and get married, would you like for your wife to be afraid of you?”

Damian shook his head. However, the young Damian was yet to fully grasp her meaning.

It was a huge shock to Damian that Lucia could treat the Duke whom he saw as someone on the peak of a distant mountain, very comfortably.

In Damian’s eyes, Lucia was a small, gentle herbivore. On the other hand, the Duke was a large, ferocious carnivore.

The boy was confused at the fact that the two beings, who in normal circumstances could not match each other, were seemingly a perfect fit.

“And here. Repeat after me. Father.” (Lucia)

“...Father.”

“Good job.”

Lucia subconsciously reached out to stroke the boy’s head. Damian was surprised and reflexively moved away and Lucia was also surprised and withdrew her hand.

They stopped walking and awkwardness filled the air.

“...Sorry, my body moved on its own... did I upset you?”

“Ah... no. I was just a little surprised.”

Damian had never had such close contact with anyone else before.

“I’m not upset or anything...” (Damian)

“When a child does something praiseworthy, one can compliment and also pet them. I won’t do it if you don’t like it.”

Damian hesitated a bit then spoke in a tiny voice.

“I don’t... hate it.”

“Really? Then, is it okay if I pet you right now?”

Damian nodded. Lucia slowly stretched her hand towards the boy as though saying, ‘I’m not your enemy’ and stroked the top of his black hair. Maybe because he was very young, his hair was much softer than she’d imagined.

She stroked his head a few times before withdrawing her hand. She felt excitement as though she was given a present because she had finally accomplished what she’d been wanting to do ever since she laid eyes on the boy.

‘When will I get to pinch his cheeks?’

Lucia began to walk with a joyful heart and Damian quickly followed, walking beside her.

“Lucia.”

“Hm?”

“Earlier, in the dining, why did you get angry?”

“Huh? That... I wasn’t angry... that was... umm that is to say...”

Lucia didn’t want to explain it nor did she know how to explain it so she began to rack her brain on how to naturally shift the topic. Just at the moment, she finally recalled something she’d been forgetting.

“Ah! Damian, you don’t have a tail-coat to wear to the party. I didn’t think of that. Do you by any chance have anything?”

“I do not.”

“Right. There’s no way you would, you were at school all the time.”

“Lucia, I don’t have to attend...”

Damian wanted to use this chance to one way or the other, remove himself from this occasion. He’d already had his fill of the women’s gazes in the horse-riding field.

He didn’t care how they saw him but he was unhappy when Lucia became the target of those strange gazes. He didn’t want Lucia to receive those gazes because of himself.

“No, you have to attend. Mmm... who can I ask about this?”

Lucia did not want to go against Damian’s intentions as much as possible but this time, she wanted to make sure Damian attended the garden party. She’d taken him to the horse-riding field and had them greet him but that was not an official occasion.

The garden party would be a formal social gathering. The scale of the party this time was big and all the renowned noble women in the northern social circle were invited.

If she were to formally introduce Damian in that gathering, Damian’s position would change.

Of course, Damian was still young and as it was a women-only garden party, it could not be his official social debut.

However, oftentimes children would appear in social circles in advance as it would be helpful to them later if they were put in people’s memories beforehand.

There was a reason noble ladies threw parties even though it was a hassle and cost a lot.

“You can purchase ready-made tail-coats for children.”

Lucia and Damian stopped walking at the sound of this voice and looked backwards. It seemed like at some time, Hugo had begun walking behind them. Seeing them stop,

Hugo closed the distance between them.

For the first time since he came to Roam, Damian stood beside his father so he was stunned and stared at his strong father. He couldn't remember how long it was since he'd seen his father so close.

"Since it's a garden party, there's not need to think of it so complicatedly." (Hugo)

"What a relief, thanks for letting me know. If it's ready-made garments then... for Damian, we have to get garments for children around twelve years old."

"He's eight."

"Damian is much bigger than usual eight year olds. Compared to his peers, he's a giant."

Hugo's gaze moved and fell on Damian. "This little guy?" was what his gaze was saying.

"You never know, someday he could be bigger than you."

"Hmm..."

His tone of his mumble was somewhat odd however, Lucia didn't catch it, rather it was Damian that noticed it.

"There's no way I'm growing bigger than father."

While thinking this, Damian began to worry whether Lucia might have annoyed his father.

"I think you were much bigger than he is when you were his age, right?"

"...I don't know."

Hugo wasn't fated with a good life where he compared heights with his peers. When he was around Damian's age, most of the slave children around him did not know his age and for him, he also didn't know his exact age until he was kidnapped and brought to Roam by the now dead Duke.

"Didn't you have a lot of work? I thought you would return to the office right away."

(Lucia)

“Am I interrupting?”

Hugo replied sullenly.

“Usually when you leave for a while and return, you get busier. Actually, you came at the right time. I don’t think Damian has greeted you officially. Damian, go ahead.”

Damian hesitantly looked at Lucia then bowed his head.

“I’d like to extend my greetings, it’s been a long time, have you been well?”

He lifted his lowered head and stealthily glanced at Lucia only to see her mouthing the words, ‘father’.

Damian squeezed out his courage.

“...Father.”

Hugo’s eyebrows jumped. The title didn’t exactly make him uncomfortable or displeased but he wasn’t used to it.

Perhaps because of Hugo’s hatred and disgust towards the existence of a father, it was a word that had never come out of his mouth.

Even when he lived under the previous Duke, he had never officially called the man father.

As his silence grew longer, Lucia secretly pulled his sleeve. He met her eyes and she was smiling so excessively that it gave some kind of unspoken pressure.

Although he was indifferent, he wasn’t dense. He opened his mouth and gave a soft reply.

“...Yes.”

The boy’s neck flushed red and seeing that, Lucia felt pleased.

‘I wish he learns of Damian’s cuteness quickly.’

But for today, it was fine. There was still a lot more time so she would take it slowly.

“So you’re taking a walk? Aren’t you busy?”

“I’m out for a walk.”

Hugo replied sourly, feeling as though she was trying to get rid of him again. On the other hand, Lucia was thinking that maybe he was tired since he was having meetings all day long so she gave in and put it off her mind.

“Then the three of us can walk together. This would be the first time for the three of us.”

“...Together?”

Hugo glanced down at Damian. When his father’s eyes landed on him, the boy flinched. Damian didn’t know why but he felt as though it wouldn’t be good to keep staying there.

The rare species of herbivore, Lucia didn’t sense anything wrong however, the carnivore cub, Damian was able to sense the subtle snarl of the great lion.

“I’ll be going back inside. There’s a book I have to read so...” (Damian)

“Damian, if you go to your desk right after eating, it’s not good for you. Your food needs to digest.” (Lucia)

“I’m done digesting. I must read this book today.”

Damian bowed his head then quickly disappeared like he was running away. Lucia wistfully watched Damian’s departing back meanwhile Hugo had an expression full of satisfaction.

‘This boy, he’s not useless at all.’

The recognition the boy wanted to receive from his father was very easily obtained.



Hugo opened his mouth after Damian left.

“Your relationship with the boy is pretty good.”

“I thought you wanted me to get along with Damian.”

Hugo had figured they should at least know each other's faces so he'd called Damian back but he didn't have any intention in particular regarding their relationship.

His wife was still young and he'd considered that it would be a bit difficult for her to tolerate an eight year old child, also, since Damian was a stiff child, if the both of them weren't put together on purpose, they wouldn't ever get involved with each other.

“Why are you taking him to the garden party?” (Hugo)

“Because they aren't many chances to introduce him to other people. He's your son and now, he's my son too so it's troublesome if people don't even know his face.”

“...Easy.”

“What?”

“It's very easy for you to call him your son.”

Lucia did not know the exact intention behind his words so she stopped walking and looked at him. When she stopped walking, Hugo also paused his footsteps.

“Do you dislike my interest in Damian? Do you perhaps think I have some other intention behind this-”

“No, Vivian. It's not like that.”

He sighed softly.

“Honestly, I didn't think both of you would get along so well.”

Hugo recalled the scene from earlier where she'd stroked Damian's head. The appearance of Damian as he offered his head like an innocent puppy was an unfamiliar

yet familiar scene causing Hugo stop and look at it.

Without warning, a piece of memory from his past surfaced in his mind.

[Hey! I said don't touch my head!]

Hugh screamed frantically at Hugo that had carelessly touched his head.

The head was the most important weakness of human beings. The moment it was exposed to the enemy, it was a direct gateway to death.

Mercenaries never touched each other's heads unless they wanted their wrists to fly off.

[It's a sign that we're friendly.]

Even though Hugh screamed frantically, Hugo laughed and replied in his usual manner.

[Inconsiderate jerk. What's so funny you're snickering everyday?]

[Smile. If you smile, you'll get good fortune, Hugh.]

[Ha... weakling.]

Hugo suddenly pushed his head in front of Hugh.

[You can touch mine too.]

[Move that thing away.]

[Just try it. I heard this is what parents usually do for their children but since we don't have anyone, we have to do it for each other.]

[I'm fine without that crap.]

[But I want someone to do it for me. Come on.]

Hugh stretched out his hands, his expression telling how much of a nuisance it was and stroked Hugo's head.

Watching Hugo laughing in delight, Hugh couldn't help but think it felt nice as he stroked Hugo's head.

"I mean... what I'm trying to say is, just tell me if he's ever rude to you." (Hugo)

"That won't happen!" (Lucia)

Hugo fiercely pulled her arms, drawing her into his embrace. He hugged her small figure tightly in his arms.

Although she was a bit taken aback, she returned the hug, placing her hands on his back. Feeling her small hands holding onto his back, Hugo couldn't help but smile.

From time to time, when memories of his brother surfaced, he felt both sweet happiness and heart-aching torture.

The pain of it was the same as usual but when he felt her body temperature, the heart-wrenching pain in his heart was relieved to some extent.

[There's a woman I want to marry. I'll introduce her to you one day.]

One day, his brother had told him so as he laughed happily.

If his brother was still alive, then he would have told him this.

[I have someone like that too. We're already married though.]



That evening, Hugo sorted out data from the meeting he'd been having all day then he looked at the report from Fabian.

Fabian's reports was usually about the capital. They contained information about movements of major powers, the arrival of foreign key figures, who they came in contact with and so on and so forth. At times, the visible status of the trading giants were also included.

Although Fabian knew his master wasn't very interested in this kind of thing, he still

looked into rumors floating around social circles and included it since it was still sort of a formal report.

When it came to his work, Fabian was really thorough. Even when gathering information of rumors, there were no gaps and even if it was a rumor that would displease the Duke, he did not exclude it.

If Fabian was overflowing with work concerning the duke and repeatedly worked overnight, he would gather rumors even more diligently for the Duke. That kind of work was more like stress reliever to him.

And so, Hugo was mostly up-to-date on the rumors concerning him.

Hugo casually flipped through the contents of the rumors as usual then suddenly, he knit his brows. The contents of the document read that rumors concerning his dowry had spread throughout the capital.

“Tsk.”

Hugo unhappily clicked his tongue. The King’s lips were too light.

‘If that old man acts in a dignified manner and something will definitely go wrong.’

Kwiz had once given such a review to the King. Then said,

‘I mean, it would be nice if it wasn’t just going wrong but he breaks his ankle in the process.’

After saying so, Kwiz had proceeded to laugh like a devilish underground boss.

Hugo’s expression as he read the following rumors became increasingly strange. The contents read that duchess was such a celestial beauty that the Duke had dragged her off to his manor before anyone else could see her.

“Hmm...”

Although Hugo felt a slight sense of discomfort with the rumor that portrayed her as a colossal beauty...

‘Well, they’re not entirely baseless...’

Was what he was thinking. According to the rumors, they married in secret so that no one else would see her.

‘It doesn’t exactly match the facts but they’re pretty close.’

His actions, such a building a horse-riding field or restricting boating so that no other man would see her was an ongoing process.

The part of the rumor that said he dragged the Duchess to his manor was also not completely wrong either because right after they got married, she came to his estate.

‘It’s not a rumor that matters.’

He judged and closed the document.

Chapter 38

Damian (9)

Lucia walked into the bedroom with a towel wrapped around her damp hair. When Hugo was gone, the maids would wait on her till she was dressed but as soon as he returned, they only followed her to the bedroom door before taking to their heels.

She sat on her dressing table, pressing the soft towel around her hair in an attempt to dry it.

She'd left drying her hair in someone else's hand for over a month so she was a bit slow doing it herself. Still, she couldn't compare to the meticulous drying of several maids attending to her hair.

She acknowledge Hugo as he walked into the room then returned her gaze back to the dressing table. He headed straight towards her and embraced her from behind. Surprised, Lucia let go of the towel causing it to fall to the ground.

"Hugh! I have to dry my hair more."

If I sleep like this, my hair will be a lion's mane tomorrow!

"Do it later."

"It's not something I can do later!"

No matter what she said, he lifted her up, moved straight to the bed, placed her down on it then kissed her still complaining lips.

Like biting into a fruit, he softly bit her lower lips and swiftly inserted his tongue into her mouth. He held her flouncing wrists down on the bed and pushed his tongue deeper into her mouth.

She still didn't know that her rebellious reactions tended to incited him more. He licked her soft lips with his tongue, enjoying the enticing taste.

He re-inserted his tongue into her mouth and the feeling of her soft and tender tongue surprised him, causing him to flinch. Perhaps because she had just taken a bath, the insides of her mouth were feverish.

When he thought of her inner thighs being as hot as this, his lower abdomen began to throb. He gently pressed his excited lower regions onto the section between her thighs.

He sloppily removed the bathrobe wrapped around her lower body, the mere thought of her tight entrance making blood rush to his lower regions. Perhaps she felt his excitement as her fidgeting began to settle down.

He let go of her wrists he'd been holding onto and she wrapped her arms around his neck, clinging to him. His tongue rummaged throughout her mouth, sometimes strongly, sometimes softly. Her fleeing tongue was easily overwhelmed by him.

As he teased the insides of her mouth and kissed her deeply, Lucia couldn't focus and fell into a trance. His hot member pressing on her delicate part as though they would instantly unite made her feel somewhat anxious and excited her more.

The moment he entangled her hot tongue and sucked on it strongly, Lucia felt her insides throb and unconsciously lifted her waist.

Her movements rubbed against his penis that was pressed against her inner thighs. He released her lips and a low moan escaped from his mouth.

With the long swooning kiss over, Lucia stared at him trying to catch her breath.

"So I've thought about it."

His voice was seemingly calming down and his eyes lit up as he saw her red lips, swollen from their kiss.

"And I think the reason you tire out so fast is because I do it all at once so let's change that. We'll do it once, rest a little, do it again, rest, then do it again, just like that. What do you think?"

Red-faced, Lucia gathered her breath before giving him a frown.

"Please don't think about things like that."

“Things like that? This is important.”

He kissed her swollen lips lightly.

“Okay then, we’re trying a new way today.”

As his gaze was like that of a predator before it leaps on its prey, Lucia swallowed nervously.

“I haven’t agreed to this...”

“Umm... then today is the trial version.”

“How is that different!”

He acted like he didn’t hear her and grabbed the front of her robe, spreading it apart. He enjoyed her body with his eyes for a moment then grabbed her bountiful breast with both hands.

He grabbed it a bit strongly causing her to flinch. He lowered his head and began licking from her navel, making his way down her body.

It was the beginning of a long and intensive night.

Her legs hung on his shoulders and her butt was raised as he penetrated deep inside of her, stimulating her. She held onto his arms to support her body and every time his penis entered her, she shut her eyes tightly and bit her lips.

Every once in a while as he thrust into her, a strong tingling feeling assaulted her from the insides and her body shivered with hypnotic pleasure.

He noticed a frown on her face and clenched his teeth. Her tight inner walls swallowed him up completely and spasmed, exciting him and he barely managed suppress his desire to ravage her insides.

“Is it difficult?”

Lucia nodded her head. It was a position that was difficult to maintain for a long time. His deep penetrations that reached deep enough to hit her womb was too stimulating for her however for him, he was in a good position.

The feeling of her vagina tightening all the way inside gave him a sense of ecstasy. He grabbed her ankle and lowered it to the side then in that position slid inside of her thighs, plunging into her vagina.

He moved his waist in a controlled rhythm, at time swiftly and at times slowly.

“Ung... Huu...”

Her body lay slightly to the side as she moaned in pleasure. The rims of her eyes grew red as he excited her with the right amount of stimulation.

She responded weakly to weak stimulations and strongly to strong stimulations. She liked gentle sex with moderate stimulation while he liked wild sex with intense stimulation. He also liked to somewhat torment her in bed till she cried.

Inwardly, she grumbled that he liked to torment her and was too much but she didn't know. She didn't know how much he considered her and controlled his desire and greed for her as much as he could.

If he were to ravage her as he pleased, she wouldn't be able to get up for days and her body would suffer. In an effort to embrace her every day, he was carefully tempering himself.

It was also one of his endeavors towards keeping the doctor's 'once-every-five-days' advice.

“Hk!”

Her body trembled intensely and her insides clenched. With the continuous stimulation, her pleasures peaked and she reached a pleasant orgasm.

He stayed still, keeping his hot member buried inside her contracting vaginal walls till they relaxed.

After a while, he rolled her body, turning her to lie on her belly. As she leaned downwards, he placed some of his weight on her body then swiftly and intensely plunged into her.

“Ah!”

As though following a tempo, he continuously thrust in heavily and pulled out slowly. She let out a brief scream and each time he thrust into her, she gripped the bedsheets tightly.

“A-!”

The feeling of his weight pressing down on her also gave her pleasure. She could vividly feel his movements with her butt as he thrust into her vagina.

It didn't hurt but she couldn't stop herself from screaming. Sometimes, she felt as though his tenderness was rather rough. It made her feel like a helpless wild animal shaking its head but at the same time, the feeling of his intense and eager desire for her was electrifying.

Lucia placed her hand on his head, her fingers grabbing his hair. She felt his slightly damp hair brushing against her fingers and enjoyed the pleasure it gave. (1)

He kissed her neck, slowly making his way upwards then he pulled her arms causing her to lean on him then lightly kissed her eyes and lips several times.

“...about Damian.”

Hugo grabbed her thighs and drew her closer to his waist. Once he pulled out, her insides were like inertia, her vaginal walls narrowed and returned back to how it was at the beginning.

He had to constantly make new paths in her tightly packed vagina. Her dense and throbbing inner walls never ceased to excite him.

“When I saw him... I was... so surprised. He looks... so much like you... Uk...”

He pushed his waist forward, slamming into her with one big thrust and in response, Lucia shut her eyes. Within seconds, he began to move, slowly increasing the intensity of his thrusts.

She wrapped her legs around his waist and her body swayed in accordance with his movements.

“Ah... s-... so...”

Lucia paused to gather her breath before continuing.

“I was... a little excite-hk.”

Hugo fiercely thrust in and out of her and she clung to him, her nails digging into his shoulders.

He took her lips into his mouth then pushed his tongue into her mouth, rummaging inside and exciting her. He ended the kiss shortly and covered her neckline with kisses, trailing down to her shoulders.

“...you saw the boy and felt excited? ... why?”

“It... felt like I was seeing you.”

“The kid will look like me for quite some time.”

“Quite some time? I think he’ll still resemble you in 10 years... Ah!”

The conversation could no longer continue. His movements intensified and Lucia could do nothing but scream coquettishly.



Hugo placed the pillow behind him to support his back and leaned halfway on the pillow. Lucia sat on his thighs, her upper body sprawled across his abdomen and chest.

Her head leaned on his chest, her arms and legs hung apart, to the side while his hand slowly moved up and down her back as though comforting her.

The fervent passion had dissipated to some extent but the lingering passion was just as before. Above all, his erect member was still fully buried inside her body.

His huge rod stirred a bit inside of her, as though reminding her of its presence and Lucia grew slightly nervous as she didn’t know when he would resume moving inside her.

She didn’t find the new way he tried particularly likeable. Although she could rest, she couldn’t sleep and they’d vigorously gone at it all night.

“Why did you send Damian to boarding school?”

Young noble children were usually taught by a private tutor. These days, while it was trendy to send children to an academy, it was usually just to gain experience when they were around 15 years old and for about three to four years.

Rather than for studying, the purpose was for noble children to build a network while interacting with several other noble children. There wasn't a case where one with a status such as successor to a duke completed a boarding school course.

They were usually not allowed as courses were taken by second sons who weren't successors and wished to select a course purely for studying purpose.

“Because I couldn't take care of him.”

When Philip brought Damian, Hugo was focused on the war which was at its peak. At most, he could only stop by Roam a few times a year.

He had been slightly fascinated at how fast the boy grew every time he saw him but to him, the boy was like a pet.

To the Hugo who had no intention of becoming a father, the child that had appeared all of sudden held no special meaning for him however, he had instinctively known that the child needed a safe home.

It was very possible that if there was no Damian, Hugo would have abandoned the Taran family or trampled it to pieces.

It was only after quite some time had passed that it occurred to Hugo that perhaps Philip had brought Damian to him because he'd realized his thoughts towards the Taran family.

It was also around this time that the war was beginning to slow down, Damian had turned five years old and Hugo had more room and time for his thoughts.

With time to think, he considered the situation on the warfront and concluded that the war didn't seem to be expanding any further. He was a perfect match for war and the thought of going back to the north and dealing with boring paperwork was loathsome.

Why do I have to? He'd questioned himself.

It wasn't any of his concern what happened to the likes of the Taran family but he liked the northern land. He didn't want to leave the wild and coarse land and it was general knowledge that the Taran family had to be doing well for the north to be prosperous.

He ended up reaching the conclusion that all he had to do was find a useful person to hand over the family to, so he appointed Damian as his successor.

He didn't intend to have another child and figured that if he took Damian, who was already known as his son, as his successor then there wouldn't be much backlash.

Later, he realized he'd thought too simple of it. The northern nobles and of course, his vassals, did not like it.

They questioned why the boy was recognized as successor and said that there was no precedent but in response Hugo laughed scornfully at them.

No precedent? Then he would do it and become the precedent. Hugo didn't care what the nobles were grumbling about but he kept thinking of the darkness he'd seen in the boy's eyes when they'd met after a long while.

Placing the boy under the public eye seemed to be harming his mind so Hugo figured that since he couldn't embrace the boy properly and raise him then it would be better for the boy to be educated in a place with no prejudice.

And so, Hugo sent the boy to boarding school where no one's eyes or hands could reach him.

'You don't hate the child, do you?' (Lucia)

Lucia held back what she wanted to ask. It would be too much to question to that extent. She still didn't know exactly how Hugo felt towards Damian and making a judgement in advance was more likely to make his feelings towards the child worsen.

"Then... since I can take care of him now, can't he keep staying in Roam?"

He reached out and grabbed her butt firmly with both hands causing Lucia to reflexively lift her head.

“I promised the boy.”

Hugo lowered his head, placing his teeth on her neck and biting down causing her slender body to flinch. He licked her neck, his tongue sweeping over the light bite mark on her neck.

“I told him, when he graduates in the future, I will hand over my position. If I tell him now, ‘don’t go to boarding school anymore’, he would think I am stopping him from succeeding me.”

He lifted his head, meeting her gaze.

“Do you think his staying here would benefit him?”

“...No, I didn’t think it through.”

A crescent line formed across his lips. He thrust his head forwards, placing his face very close to hers.

“Although it’s nice and cute.” (Hugo)

His lips touched hers briefly and he moved away.

“Don’t go too far.”

Lucia interpreted his words as telling her to not get involved in his child’s affairs but Hugo’s meaning in asking her to get along with the child but limiting her some was that he did not want the child to come between their relationship.

Unfortunately, the misunderstanding that had risen through their conversation could not be resolved now.

He captured her lips in his mouth then reached out, grasping her butt firmly with his hand. He lifted her up and immediately rammed her soaking entrance down on his erect penis. Her smooth waist curved and her head fell backwards as he continuously lifted her up and down, pounding into her fleshly insides.

Her hand moved backwards, grabbing onto his legs for support and her body shook with his intense movements.

“Ung... ah! Hugh!”

He grabbed her shoulders, pulling her forward as he hurriedly thrust into her several times, the motion bringing his lips to hover around her ears and his rough whisper floated into her ears.

“Haa... Vivian...”

The way he said her name sent tingles up her spine. She didn’t know since when but when he called her Vivian it no longer felt awkward. Rather whenever he called her...

‘Vivian.’

She felt like she’d discovered a new side to herself. As her insides throbbed and squeezed, he suppressed a moan and quickly flipped her to lie down horizontally on the bed.

He immediately re-capturing her lips and at the same time, repeatedly plunged in and out of her deep fleshy insides. While holding onto his arms, Lucia’s body trembled with the tingles of pleasure.

She vividly felt his full length inside her body and instinctively widened her legs, lifting her butt to accept him deeper.

Hugo ended the breathless kiss, lifted his head and began to concentrate more on the movement of his waist.

He moved slowly at first then abruptly increased his speed, heavily thrusting in and out continuously.

A coquettish cry escaped from her mouth in response to the vigorous movements in her lower body and she watched his solid chest move as he devoured her.

His ripped muscles and tiny nipples moved as he thrust into her, enticing her to touching them. When his movements slowed down a little, she stroked his chest with her hand, feeling the movement of his muscles.

She lifted her head, lightly licking his chest and his body instantly jerked in response. She once again stuck her tongue out, this time licking around his nipple for a while.

Hugo swallowed back his curses and fiercely re-captured her lips. As he wildly drove his member into her, her body shook back and forth and her screams were blocked by his lips covering hers.

Her sight repeatedly brightened and blurred and she felt like a firework had exploded in front of her. She wasn't even sure herself whether she was closing or opening her eyes.

Tears flowed down from her eyes and Hugo lowered his head to lick them up. The scalding heat that filled up her head and the passion that felt like it would burn her to ashes was exhausting but it also felt good and Lucia clung to him.

Chapter 39

Damian (10)

Lucia tussled with him all night and was barely able to sleep at dawn. By the time she woke up, it was already daylight.

She was against his new way. His tenaciousness was inexplicable and she'd already given up on explaining his endurance.

Lucia continuously thought about getting up from bed, but her body did not listen to her. She had such a hard workout for two consecutive days in a month so her body felt languid.

She fell into shallow sleep and upon woke up, she felt a soft touch on her hair and opened her eyes. She didn't know when he'd come in but he was sitting on the bed, his finger running through her hair.

She was sleepy-eyed and watched him with an empty gaze. Their eyes met and he lowered his head, lightly kissing her lips.

"I was worried since you haven't gotten up yet. Are you okay?"

The soft touch on her lips told her this was real. Last night, she hated him a little but seeing him now, the hatred vanished into thin air.

"...at least you have a conscience."

She bluntly blamed him, closed her eyes again and heard him laugh a little.

Hugo's fingers ran through her hair, sweeping through it like a comb. It felt good and a little ticklish.

'Isn't my hair is completely disheveled?'

As the thought came to her mind, her sleepiness deserted her and she raised the blanket over her head.

“What’s wrong?” (Hugo)

“...my head...”

“Does it hurt? The doctor...”

“No, it’s not that.”

She lowered the blanket a little, her eyes peeking at him.

“Yesterday... I didn’t dry my hair properly. It’s probably a mess.”

It was the heart of a woman who wanted to show only a pretty figure in front of the man she loved. He could not understand her words, and tilting his head to the side, ripped the blanket off her. She let out a short scream and he kissed her lightly on her lips.

“What of it? You look pretty.”

Lucia stared at him, her gaze full of intent.

“...Flirt.”

“...What?”

“Nothing.”

He felt wronged. If she’d said that in the past, he would honestly have nothing to say. But not now.

“Vivian, did I do something wrong?”

“Aren’t you busy?”

“Don’t change the topic. I know your list defines me that way, but why are you saying this now, all of a sudden?”

“What list?”

“I know you have a list of all the things I’ve done wrong in your head.”

“What?”

Lucia was dumbfounded and burst into laughter.

“There’s a list in my head?” (Lucia)

“Weren’t you steadily adding one at a time?”

Lucia started laughing again. He sourly looked on as she began to laugh. He couldn’t see why she was laughing so much about what he said and couldn’t understand her laughter.

“Then, when did I make this list?” (Lucia)

“Why are you asking me that? You know better than I do.”

Lucia shrugged and once again burst into laughter. The thought that he also wonders what other people are thinking was very amusing and interesting.

‘Things I’ve done wrong.’

Through those words, he admitted to her that he’d done a lot of things wrong. She thought he was someone that was very unlikely to admit it even if he made a mistake.

“There is no such list. I can’t put up with something so complicated.”

“Then what was the word that popped up before?”

Lucia shyly pursed her lips.

“Because you said that all of a sudden.”

“What did I say?”

“...look... pretty.”

Lucia felt a bit embarrassed to say it herself and her words weren’t clear. She’d heard herself being called gentle or cute but she didn’t think the word ‘pretty’ matched her appearance.

“Is it wrong to just say what I feel?”

Lucia stared at him blankly. He was flirtatious yes, but he wasn't the type to whisper sweet nothings into a woman's ear so his words came off a bit unfriendly.

He was someone who had a lot and as such, was the flirt that women loved to cling to. Lucia reached out and rubbed her head.

As expected, just by touching her hair, she could feel it was untidy. Even without looking at a mirror, it was obvious it was a mess.

“Pretty? This look?”

“I don't know what's wrong with it, you look pretty.”

His expression did not change at all. It was as though he was looking at a tree and saying it was a tree. As Lucia kept staring into his eyes doubtfully, his expression grew increasingly awkward.

“Is it that you don't like that way of expression? Then, your beauty is so bright that it seems blinding...”

“Are you making fun of me?”

Lucia replied sullenly. Hugo sighed and placing one hand on his forehead.

“Tell me what you want me to do.”

“...Pretty? Me?”

“You're pretty.”

She didn't know what he was thinking, but she decided not to think more complicatedly about it. It was good even if it was empty words.

She felt pleased, happy, ticklish inside, and when she looked at him, she couldn't help but chuckle.

His expression became somewhat twisted and he spoke.

“Don’t laugh like that. It makes me want to eat (you).”

Lucia laughed even louder and looking at her, Hugo burst into laughter too. It was hard to pinpoint it but anyhow, it was nice to see her feeling comfortable.

After admitting to herself that she loved him, Lucia’s heart was more at peace and the mood around her grew relaxed.

When Hugo was away from Roam, Lucia was always on his mind. Although they’d reconciled before he left, he’d felt like it was somewhat insufficient and was uncomfortable with it.

It seemed like they weren’t putting out the fire but simply covering it up so they couldn’t see it. He was worried that when he came back to Roam, she would turn away from him as the issue wasn’t fully settled.

Contrary to his worries, she was doing very well. Rather, she became even brighter than before.

The thought that even without him, she would be completely fine, made his heart feel cold.

‘I want her’

He wanted to have all of her body and mind.

But how could he have a woman that had declared that she would never love him. It was the biggest challenge in his life.

He’d never properly fallen in love before. The brother he loved, said he loved him but chose death in the end.

She was going to be his first love. However, it was a tragedy that he’d experienced too much physical love before he knew of emotional love.

At times, love was so simple that an honest word of confession could be the key but he didn’t know that.

“Is it okay for you keep staying here? You aren’t busy?” (Lucia)

Hugo could sense that her voice was much clearer than before.

‘She likes being called pretty.’

Now, he began making a list in his head.

“Busy or not busy, for me, there’s no end to work so I can rest for as long as I don’t do it.”

“So you’re not working?”

“It’s not like that, I mean you don’t have to fret over it. Is it troublesome if I don’t work?”

“...It would be.”

“Why?”

“The husband has to feed his wife. And to do that, you have to make money.”

Hugo couldn’t help but laugh.



Lucia lifted her head to look at him at the sound of laughter. At times, he would laugh oddly when she said something and Lucia couldn’t tell what part of it he was laughing at.

“It would be very easy to feed you. Even if I make money, seems like you don’t really use it.”

“I do use it. You know how much money it takes to throw a party?”

“I mean for personal spending.”

“I also use it for personal spending. I bought flowers to decorate the garden...”

“Dresses or jewelry. Things like that.”

“I’ve spent on that. Spent a lot of money to repair a dress but the Taran warehouse is

overflowing with jewelry. I wouldn't be able to wear all of them till I die."

This was because noble women tended to accumulate lots of precious ornaments. For a family of considerable wealth, there would be precious ornaments passed from generation to generation however, these ornaments would be property of the family.

In the care of a divorce, the precious ornaments obtained by the noble women were completely recognized as their property apart from the alimony.

The conversation somewhat failed to get his point across so Hugo spoke a bit more directly.

"Do you not want to spend my money?"

Lucia thought about the meaning of his words for a moment then laughed.

"It's not like that. Did you think so?"

Surprisingly, he was quite sensitive. Discovering this unexpected side to him was somehow so cute, Lucia couldn't stop laughing. To think that the huge man who gives off enormous pressure was cute... perhaps this was a side effect of being with Damian.

Since she'd looked at small Hugo for a long while, looking at big Hugo now, the previous threat level was somehow cut in half. It didn't occur to her that maybe this was a result of Hugo's effort.

If Lucia recalled their first encounter at the victory ball, she'd be able to tell just how different he is from back then. Even if out in the world, he was the King of beasts, in front of her, he killed his momentum, becoming more docile.

"Why're you laughing?" (Hugo)

She couldn't see the image of the Taran Duke, the black lion of the war that overwhelmed people simply by being there, in the man grumbling in front of her.

And so, the little rabbit, Lucia sat at the feet of the great Lion, laughing and thinking he was cute.

"I was just so surprised. I didn't expect you to have think like that. Truthfully, I'm not fond of shopping unnecessarily."

“Hah... right. Our ladyship is used to being thrifty and frugal.”

“It’s a good thing though.”

“Did I say otherwise?”

He’d never heard of a wife being criticized for being frugal. Asking her to use and spend his money somewhat seemed like a joke now.

His wife was fragile, she felt like she’d be crushed if he held her a bit more tightly but she had a rock-solid will, confidence and independence in her thoughts. Even though her appearance was full of contradictions, she didn’t contradict herself.

Hugo needed something to hold onto her. There was already a strong bond of marriage tying them together but it was lacking.

He wanted to find something based on her personal desires so she could never escape from him. It was not money and neither was it power.

As for her social activities, they were limited to the necessary minimum amount that she had to do. There weren’t many people she had frequent exchanges with and she hadn’t built an active rapport with influencers of the northern social circles.

She didn’t show much interest in his work neither did she snoop around in his office.

Money and Power.

‘If one subtracts the two, what else is there for humans to have?’

The people of the bottom class do not have money and power yet they have families and bear children with love.

What do they have?

‘Is it the child?’

At the sudden thought, his frame of mind grew somber. He definitely did not want a child born from his blood to exist. Even if there was no reason, he couldn’t give her a child anyways.

When he thought about it carefully, he found himself doing well. He'd been proven by many woman, and he was confident.

If he could make her toss and turn at night because she was lonely without him then that was truly killing two birds with one stone. It was a little instinctive but in the first place, the more instinctive the desire is, the greedier it is.

The problem was he wasn't too sure if she liked it too so he decided to garner some confidence.

"Do you like doing it with me?"

"...Huh?"

"Are you satisfied on the bed?"

Lucia's face, all the way to her neck, gradually turned red. She stared at his brazen face for a moment then turned around, her back facing him.

"I need to sleep a bit more. You should hurry and get back to work."

Hugo was considerably shocked by her turning away. Was it terrible to the extent that she didn't even want to answer?

He hastily pulled at her.

"Vivian, what's the problem? The length? Number of times? Not enough caressing? Or is it the position..."

Lucia quickly sat up and screamed at him.

"That's enough so please just stop! How can you? You... you... those words..."

Her face was as red as an apple as she rambled causing him to chuckle. The sight of her embarrassed and shaken up made him want to tease her.

"What's wrong all of a sudden? I've said much more racy stuff than that."

"Th... That... the situation was different."

“In the bedroom. On the bed. What’s so different?”

“Even if we’re in the same place, time has passed so the situation is different. Now, it’s morning...”

Lucia jerked as he climbed over her knees and onto the bed. Even though there was no place to escape to, she was thinking of escaping. However he was faster.

His arms intercepted her body on the bed, closing up any gaps for escaping.

“It’s not like we’ve never done it in the morning before.”

“You also overslept then...”

“Your criteria’s pretty unique. It’s okay to do it from night to morning but not in the morning?”

He lowered his head and covered her lips with his own. The kiss which started off gently quickly flared up as their tongues tangled with each other.

His tongue rummaged inside her mouth, caressing her gums, stroking the inside of her palate and rolling her tongue like a ball.

Their lips separate for a moment then were glued together again.

When his hands flew to her chest, grabbing her breasts and rubbing with his fingers, Lucia suddenly came to her senses.

“Look here, Beast-ssi.” (1) (Lucia)

His red eyes widened in surprise.

“If you go any further than this, you’ll have to explain to the guests tomorrow why they have to leave as soon as they arrive.”

“Ha-ha. You really...”

He burst out laughing and took Lucia into his arms. Lucia felt her body tingle at the sound of his laughter.

‘Ah...’

Lucia sighed inwardly

‘I’m happy now.’

She was so happy that her heart felt numb and tingling. She felt the edges of her eyes sting and buried her head in his chest.

Chapter 40

Damian (11)

It was afternoon and Hugo was busy working on documents in his office when the scent of tea drifted into his nose. He knew someone had come in but he was focusing on something else so he didn't pay much attention.

After a while, he looked up, glancing at the cup of tea that Jerome had placed quietly before leaving then he put his pen down on the table and leaned back in his chair. He picked up the cup of tea and walked into the balcony, deciding to take a short break.

Because of the incoming party, the garden was filled with a lot of people busying around. He looked around the garden, searching for his wife.

He found her soon enough at a corner of the garden but she was not alone. She was with a black-haired child-Damian.

'They're really friendly with each other.'

He muttered to himself, frowning slightly. Looking at it objectively, their relationship was one where they could never get too close to each other.

He was a little worried about her taking Damian to the garden party because a considerable amount of people would be suspicious about her intentions.

He considered telling her about his thoughts but shoved that idea away. She would know at least that much, she wasn't a foolish woman.

Although it was interesting that Damian was getting along with her quite well. He wasn't a very sociable boy but within a few weeks, he was made into an obedient puppy.

Even his butler Jerome was the same. 'Milady', 'Milady', was all he could say.

She seemed to have the amazing ability to turn people to her side. Even though many people liking her was definitely much better than their being her enemy, for some

reason, he felt displeased inside.

‘What are they doing?’

For a while now, the both of them had been crouched low and their heads were facing each other. He couldn’t see what they were doing and he couldn’t see their faces properly because he was too far away.

‘What the heck are those two doing?’

He grumbled inwardly.

‘Without me.’

The last words were what was truly in his heart but because he was so childish, he couldn’t even bear to say it to himself.



Lucia and Damian were so engrossed in watching the amusing baby fox that they weren’t paying much attention to anything else. The big-eared yellow fox had awkward steps, toddling as it walked.

Whenever it tried to escape from between the two of them, it was gently blocked with one hand. It didn’t take long for it to give up on escaping, sit down and begin chasing its tail.

[He’s a rare mild and gentle guy for a fox. He’ll be easy to tame]

This was the common remark that the experienced breeders, which Kate sent to help, made after looking at the fox.

“Did you decide on a name, Damian?”

“Lucia, is... is it really okay for me to name it?”

“Of course. I’ll be happy if you name it.”

After Lucia asked him to give the fox a name a few days ago, he’d worried about it for a while and rummaged through all sorts of dictionaries while his studying took a back

seat.

“Then... Asha.” (Damian)

“Asha? Does it have a meaning?” (Lucia)

“Just like the name... I want it to have a strong vitality and last long.” (1)

“Asha. That’s a good name.”

Lucia lifted the fox and held it out to Damian.

“Since you’ve given it a name, hold it. Don’t just look at it.”

“Lucia, I...”

“Hurry up. I’ll drop it.”

As the time it was held up in the air grew longer, the baby fox began to struggle and wriggle around in her hands. Once he heard her say she’d drop it, Damian quickly reached out and carefully took the fox into his arms.

Asha lifted its long snout, looking at the boy for a moment, then it relaxed in his arms. The body temperature and the sound of fast-paced heartbeat of the small animal in his arms shocked Damian. It was a new sensation to him.

His emotions felt complicated and his body trembled. He felt like he hadn’t know what it meant to be alive till this moment.

“I feel... strange.”

“Why?”

“Just... It’s not like I hate it but I feel weird. My chest feels a bit prickly...”

Looking at Damian who didn’t know how much strength to put into his arms as he held the fox, Lucia smiled.

“Damian, that feeling means you think it’s loveable.”

“Love... able?”

“Yes. It’s the feeling your mother must have felt when she held you after you were born. You feel something is so loveable, your heart hurts.”

Damian stared silently at the fox with for a while, his expression unknown. The fox squirmed in his arms, adjusting itself to a more comfortable position then it placed its chin on the boy’s arms, blinking its eyes.

Damian lifted his head to look at Lucia, smiling brightly. It was the clear smile of a child, no darkness hidden within it.

The first carefree smile of the boy who was always stiff and brusque sent a burst of emotions through Lucia, deeply touching her.

Her gaze met Damian’s and she smiled at him.

A little far away, Hugo’s red eyes gazing at them trembled strongly. Unable to curb his curiosity, he finally left his office.

He walked towards the corner of the garden where they stayed crouched and at some distance, he was able to see why they weren’t paying attention to anything else.

‘What is that?’

The sight of the little beast wriggling around and the two of them concentrating on it like a never-seen-before treasure in the world came into view.

As he drew a little closer, he was able to hear their conversation.

‘Giving a beast a name? a useless act.’

The white horse he’d ridden for so many years still had no name.

‘...Lucia...?’

He furrowed his brow.

When he heard the name the evening when they were taking a walk, he’d thought he heard wrong but he was still somewhat sensitive to the name and this time, he

definitely heard it and clearly too.

Why would Damian call her by that name?

It wasn't Duchess, it wasn't Mother and it wasn't even her name. He stopped walking, standing still to think about it but couldn't reach a conclusion so he resumed his journey.

However in a couple of steps, his footsteps paused again.

Looking at the boy's smile that was as bright as sunshine, his heart clenched, filling his chest with biting pain.

'Hah... '

He sighed mournfully.

'It's you.'

He smiled powerlessly. The child's smile was very similar to the one his brother had given him on the day they'd met.

He just hadn't realized it but it seemed the brother that he'd been missing had always been by his side.



Hugo's memory returned to the first day he met Damian, the scene vividly drawn out before him.

One day, Philip brought in an awkward young child that was yet to walk smoothly. Even without being explained, the child's black hair and red eyes were traits unique to the Taran bloodline.

He left the child in Jerome's hands and when he was left alone with Philip, he questioned fiercely.

"What is that?"

"He is young master Hugo's son." (Philip)

At first, he was at loss for words then he became enraged. A male child? Without a relative, a boy of Taran blood could never be born.

"Don't be stupid. That dead old geezer must've planted a seed somewhere, who are you trying to fool?"

"Haven't you ever heard of young master Hugo having a lover?" (Philip)

He cursed furiously before retorting.

"What? The old fool's tricks?"

He was so angry that he felt like he was going crazy.

"No, it is not. Young master Hugo and the miss fell in love without knowing each other's identity and young master Damian is the result of their love." (Philip)

"Love?! Bullshit!"

In that moment, he hurled curses at his dead brother.

'Fucking idiot. After acting like you know it all, you've finally done it.'

"Why didn't he know his child was born?" (Hugo)

If his brother knew he had a child, he never would have chosen to kill himself.

"Young master Hugo passed away without knowing young master Damian was conceived." (TN: He didn't know the chick was pregnant)

"Did the old geezer also not know?"

"Yes."

'Hah. Serves him right, the old fool needs some retribution in hell.'

He(Hugo) muttered to himself, chuckling insidiously.

"What of the child's name? Did you give it to him, old man?"

"I wouldn't dare. Young master Damian's mother gave him his name."

"Mother?"

He(Hugo) remarked mockingly.

"She must be my half-sister. Here I thought they were all dead but there's a half-sister. How many children did that old fool make?"

"Just as you know it, however from childhood, the miss had a weak body and was frequently ill. The deceased Duke determined that she would be unable to have a healthy child and decided to dispose of her. Hence, the deceased Duke believed the young miss to be dead."

"Disposal. Ha! That's exactly the type of thing that crazy old fool would do."

He ridiculed icily.

"So? This half-sister of mine that's supposed to be dead, how did she meet him, do this love play and give birth to a child?"

"I can only say that destiny is indeed something that cannot be predicted. I can also assure you that there was no ulterior motives or interference in their relationship."

"Destiny? What crap. Where's the child's mother?"

"She passed away after giving birth. If you want a more detailed explanation..."

"Enough."

As to whether or not they really knew each other's identities, or whether or not there was outside interference in their relationship, there was no way for him to know.

No matter how long Philip rambled on, he couldn't guarantee that it was the truth. Rather than listening to the old man's bullshit, he switched his focus to the problem at hand.

"So? what? Why did you bring him to me?" (Hugo)

No matter whether it was his brother's child, he was not his dead brother.

His brother was born the son of the loathsome former Duke and had a completely different personality like the different entity that he was.

Moreover, his brother wasn't informed that the child was born so bringing the child now made him suspicious.

"He's young master Hugo's flesh and blood. It is only right to hand him over."

"Don't blabber that rubbish in front of me, take him and leave. I don't know when I'll want to kill it if it stays around me."

However, Philip left Damian and secretly disappeared. He hid himself so well, not a trace of him could be found.

'Then I'll make sure the bastard doesn't see a hair on the child's head till the day he dies.'

Hugo gnashed his teeth in rage and invoked a ban against Philip approaching Damian.

Time went by and sometime later Philip secretly returned and tried to meet Damian but after seeing the guards placed around Damian, a report came back that Philip had once again disappeared.

Although it (the ban) was something done in a fit of anger at the time, when he thought about it, he realized it was a good thing.

Because of the war, Hugo was swamped and extremely busy so he got someone to mostly look after the child. There was almost no difference from neglecting the child.

When he returned to Roam several months later, they were all accepting Damian as his son. He'd never personally said that Damian was his son but no one thought was an issue.

This was because of how much they resembled each other. Both of them looked so much alike, leaving no room for doubts.

However, Damian's appearance caused Hugo's intention of ending the Taran family line to amount to nothing.

Hugo's feeling towards Damian were delicately complex. His brother's only mark left

in this world and mass of burden.

It wasn't love and hatred, he liked the boy just as much as he disliked him.

However, when he saw that smile on the boy, the smile that was exactly like his brother's, he realized something.

Just as he'd intended, the cursed Taran blood would end with him. His twin brother was a mutation that should have never been born of Taran blood.

He was supposed to be born with a blood full of cruelty and madness yet he was very unlike the Taran bloodline, he was gentle, pure and loved life.

And Damian inherited the blood of his brother.

The Taran Family, led by Damian would be reborn in a completely new way.

Damian noticed Hugo approaching and quickly stood up. The fox was still in his arms and he was flustered by the sudden appearance of Hugo.

Since he wasn't studying at this time and was busy chattering, he was afraid he would be scolded.

Hugo indifferent glanced at the fox in the boy's arms then spoke to Lucia.

"Wasn't the fox hunt just for sightseeing?"

"I meant to do that but Lady Milton told me she'd help me obtain a fox. I hasn't been long since I got it as a gift."

Hugo was unhappy with the trivial creature rolling around in Damian's arms.

'So now, she'll be going around with a beast in her arms too.'

First, frequent outings with Damian, now it's a fox. The road to keeping her by his side was so difficult. In his heart, what he really wanted to do was keep her only to himself so only he could see her.

"Damian."

“Yes? Yes!” (Damian)

It was the first time Hugo had used Damian’s name directly in front of him. Before when he called Damian directly, he said

‘Kid.’

And when he was conversing with other people and talking to Damian, he said.

‘Boy.’

“Fox hunting is not a game for men. It’s a trifling game for women. Return the fox to its master.”

He commanded arrogantly.

Lucia was dumbfounded and glared at him. A trifling game for women???

Damian alternated glances between the two of them then quickly handed over the fox to Lucia.

As he handed it over, there was none of the emotions from a while ago. He didn’t even show the slightest dismay or lingering attachment.

Lucia gave a hollow smile.

“Follow me.” (Hugo)

“Yes.”

The boy quickly replied like a soldier with military discipline.

“Where are you taking him?” (Lucia)

“We’re going to have a talk. Between men.” (Hugo)

Hugo began to walk ahead and again, Damian repeatedly alternated glances between the two of them then bowed his head in Lucia’s direction.

After which he quickly ran after Hugo. Unlike the usually calm Damian, this one was

obviously excited.

“My goodness. What? Are they excluding me?”

Lucia was speechless. She felt a sense of betrayal from Damian who never looked back. The thought that all her efforts were less than one word from his father made her feel dispirited.

As she watched the departing backs of father-and-son, her dispirited heart didn't take long to disappear. Their very alike behind view was very adorable. Damian's figure as he took exceptionally light steps was also fun to look at.

“Please, get close enough that I'll get jealous.”

While chuckling to herself, Lucia turned towards the workers in the garden. There was still a lot to do for the garden party tomorrow.

Chapter 41

Damian (12)

He'd ultimately asked Damian to follow him but quite frankly, he had no idea what he could do with the child.

Roughly looking over the boy, he could say the boy had grown up well but properly examining the child felt awkward.

"Do you read a lot?"

"Yes, I like books so I read a lot."

Hugo took Damian to his study. Before this, she'd been the only one allowed access to his study.

As soon as Damian entered the study, his eyes widened, his mouth fell open and his head swiftly turned left and right.

The huge library in his academy had a lot of books but it wasn't stylish. Owned by an individual, the magnificent scale and superb atmosphere lit up a soft light in the eyes of the fascinated boy.

"Is that place part of the study too?"

Damian asked, looking at the firmly closed door at the right of the study.

Hugo's eyes sank. The place where he was able to enter after succession. The place where only the head of the Taran Family could enter. It was a secret room that contained all the truths about the Taran family.

"Don't concern yourself with that one. It's full of garbage."

Hugo had no plans of passing down that room to Damian. He would burn and erase all traces of it sometime before Damian takes over as the master of Taran.

This was what he'd made up his mind to do for a long time. The secrets of Taran would end with him alone.

"You can look around as you please. If you want to read a book, you can come in and read at any time."

"Yes! Thank you."

The boy had been jittery for a while because he wanted to look around so as soon as permission was given, he quickly bolted away and began to look all over the place.

There was warmth in Hugo's eyes as he watched the boy frantically move from place to place, scouring the study.

Sometime later, Hugo left the study, leaving the boy alone as the boy had taken out a book from the shelves and was completely engrossed in reading.

When he was about to enter his office, the name 'Lucia' once again crossed his mind. He knit his brows and stood holding the door handle. After a while, he went inside.



From morning, there was a line of carriages heading towards Roam to attend the garden party hosted by the Duchess.

Because the Duchess always held small tea parties and never a ball, this garden party reached many generations.

The age group were diverse, ranging from elderly women to unmarried girls, the attendees were also diverse, composed of well-known people in the northern high society, those who were not well-known, families of vassals and those who were not families of vassals.

Everyone invited today had at least been invited to one of the Duchess' previous tea parties once.

The tea parties of the Duchess were not repetitive exchanges with a small group of people but were distinctively broad meetings with various groups of people.

The evaluation of the Duchess in the high society varied from person to person.

Those who dreamt of a grand and luxurious ball expressed their regrets while influential figures in the established high society favored the non-aggressive manner of the Duchess.

“Thank you for the invitation.”

“Welcome. I’m glad you could come.”

Lucia welcomed the ladies as they arrived one at a time, greeting them with a light embrace.

It was hectic constantly meeting the eyes of people and smiling at them as they entered but once there was a little gap, she called for her maid.

“Damian is running late. Go check if he’s still far away and report to me.”

“Yes, Milady.”

There were dozens of round tables arranged in the extensive space of the garden. They were covered with white lace tablecloths and each table was decorated with a vase.

There were no designated seats, allowing people to sit freely. The attendees understood this and they made groups of twos and threes, taking up tables one at a time.

In the blink of an eye, the garden was filled with the talk and laughter of women. It was a really good weather to schedule an outside program.

The sunlight was moderate and there was next to no wind. Even though they had already entered the cold season, it was quite cozy today.

The elevated atmosphere filled the face of the ladies with laughter.

“Lady Milton. Welcome, come on in.”

“Thank you for the invitation, the weather is very good today and I know the party will be lovely.”

After confirming that Kate came alone, Lucia expressed her regret.

“Madam Michelle did not come with you.”

“Yes, she wanted to come but her health isn’t very good these days.”

Countess Corzan was weakening in energy day by day due to old age and as Countess Corzan was like a teacher to her, Lucia’s heart felt uncomfortable.

“I have to go see her sometime.”

“Great-aunt will be very pleased if you do.”

A maid quickly went up to Lucia and informed her.

“Young Master is waiting in the first floor hall.”

Kate looked on worriedly as Lucia asked to be excused and went inside. She knew ahead of time about Lucia’s plan to introduce Damian at the garden party.

Kate had cautiously expressed her concerns but Lucia’s thoughts on it were firm and she couldn’t change her mind.

‘I don’t know if this will turn out okay.’

The problem of illegitimate children gaining peerage was more determined by the attitude of women than the attitude of men. No one wanted to be in a situation where an outsider comes in out of the blue, kicks away their good fortune and overtakes the child of the legal wife.

‘Lucia was born a princess and then became a Duchess. She doesn’t seem to know of the noble wives’ mentality to an abnormal degree. Although, rather than not knowing their mentality, should I say she’s detached from their desires?’

Kate had interacted with a wide range of people. If they were of like-mind, they didn’t discriminate between people, regardless of their status.

So, naturally there was a lot to compare between how a person with a high status and a person with a low status differ in basic attitude.

The typical daughters that were born noble ladies, had never experienced a rough day, married that way, lived as noble ladies, and had a very narrow view.

It wasn't that they had malice but from the outset they didn't know anything else. They were arrogant, fussy, immensely prideful and selfish. Apart from a difference in degree, they were pretty much the same way.

It wasn't like Lucia did not know the attributes of such ladies. Sometimes during conversation, she was surprisingly sharp. However, understanding with one's head differed from accepting it with one's heart. To Kate, Lucia was intriguing.

It was her first time seeing someone like Lucia in such a position. Lucia wouldn't reveal herself of her own accord nor would she stand on top of anyone. She wasn't pretending to be humble, it was her nature.

There were no pretenses, no fabrications, even when saying something, she took the recipient of her words into consideration. So, Kate felt most comfortable when she was around her.

Kate's expression grew dark when she saw an elderly noble woman with her head stiffly raised high amongst the cluster of guests.

The Countess of Wales was a well-known figure in the northern high society. Even though her (Kate's) great aunt was respected by a lot of people, her great aunt's actual influence was not that significant.

This was because her great aunt did not like this woman. The Countess of Wales and her great aunt were extreme polar opposites on everything. In fact, the relationship between the two was not good at all.

The Wales family was considered one of the most prestigious and wealthy families in the North. The Countess of Wales wielded her influence to her heart's content and enjoyed people flocking towards her.

'Great-aunt said her activities have come to a lull and these days, she flaps her wings around more.'

As the Countess of Wales did not enjoy horse riding, she was never found in the horse-riding field. However, according to the rumors spreading around, when she heard that Lucia had brought Damian to the horse-riding field and introduce him to people, she'd remarked,

[She's young. She should have someone close to her, giving her wise advice.]

‘I hope she doesn’t stir up pointless drama today but... ’

Kate knew inwardly just how smart and firm the seemingly docile Lucia was. Hence, although she was worried, she wasn’t anxious.



Lucia entered the central tower and found Damian lingering around the same spot then she approached him.

“You look splendid, Damian.”

Damian was dressed in a small sized adult-like tailcoat size and looked like the perfect little gentleman. Lucia wished father and son would wear tailcoats, standing side by side as she held them in each arms and entered the party venue.

The ladies wouldn’t be able to take their eyes off them. Just imagining it made her smile happily.

“It’s a bit... stifling.” (Damian)

“You’ll get used to it soon. The guests have arrived, let’s go.”

Damian stood still and did not move as though he’d been nailed to the ground.

“Lucia, no matter how I think about this, I...”

“Damian, from now on, you’ll have to stand in front of a lot of people. Today is just the beginning. There is no need to feel pressured, if anyone misbehaves around you, just tell me. I’ll teach them a lesson.”

Damian stared blankly in response and Lucia put her hand on her waist.

“You don’t believe me? All right. I’ll tell your father instead. He’s a scary person so he’ll teach them a good lesson.”

A little smile floated onto the boy’s lips.

“Let’s go.”

Lucia reached out, grabbing Damian's hand and pulling at it. Damian flinched at the sudden contact. He gazed at the hand holding his and obediently followed, walking along. It was a soft and warm hand.

His gaze slowly moved from her hands to arms to her back. There was no light coming off of her but his eyes felt dazzled. He was dazed by her brightness and couldn't move his eyes away.

When the hostess of the party, the Duchess appeared, the noise gradually subsided and the venue became quiet.

Lucia glanced through the ladies of various ages sitting in gorgeous and colorful attires and announced the start of the party with a greeting.

"I would like to extend my thanks to all of you who were willing to attend today. It is my first time having so many people in one place so there might be some immaturity but I hope we all have a good time."

Amongst the ladies attending today, the ones that were older and more influential than Lucia bowed their head slightly.

"And, there is someone I would like to introduce to you all today. Damian, come on out."

Damian who was hidden from people's sight, walked up and stood beside Lucia at her call.

"You are all well aware of him. In the future, the Young Lord will be the master of Taran after the Duke. He's still young but I wanted him to give his greetings so I called for him."

Most of them could not hide their confusion at the boy's appearance. After a moment of silence, the crowd stirred. The confused ones were mainly the singles or young wives while the expressions of the older wives stiffened.

In the midst of this, one person placed down their teacup heavily, making a loud noise. It was the Countess of Wales.

Her expression was cold and she lowered her hand to her knees, her mouth tightly shut. People's gazes traveled over to the Countess.

The Countess' expression did not reveal any displeasure. She just remained silent and expressionless. As the Countess' silence grew longer and longer, the expression of people around gradually stiffened.



Around the time when the garden party started, Hugo was working on documents in his office. When Jerome came in with tea at his usual time, Hugo questioned him.

"Is the party going well?"

"Yes, I heard almost all the guests have arrived."

"Anyone that was invited and didn't show?"

The act of receiving an invitation and being absent without previous communication was an insult to the organizer. Unless one was without fear, they wouldn't do such a thing but because she'd said she would introduce Damian, Hugo was somewhat concerned.

"Apart from two people who informed me of their absence due to health issues and two others who sent word that they would be arriving slightly late, they are all in attendance."

Hugo nodded and shifted his eyes back to the paperwork on his desk.

Suddenly, the name 'Lucia' popped up in his head again. He would forget the name for a moment then it would pop up in his head again, the name just kept hovering around his head.

He was curious but he didn't want to ask her, it would be too embarrassing to ask her directly. After all, it had come to mind that perhaps it was just a nickname that the both of them shared between themselves.

Last night, he couldn't have his wife. Because of the garden party, she had to get up early and had him promise not to touch her at all so he really only hugged her and slept.

She slept sweetly, not caring about him who was too flared up to sleep. Without any

power or energy, what bait could he throw to catch her?

“By any chance, have you heard of the name, ‘Lucia’?”

Hugo was spewing these words bitterly, like a complaint, but when Jerome replied with ‘Yes’, Hugo quickly lifted his head.

“You’ve heard of it? Who is it?”

Jerome tensed up in the face of his master’s unusual reaction. While thinking that there was no way his master didn’t know, he had answered indifferently but his master didn’t seem to know.

‘Oh dear. Milady, why is Master not aware of this?’

Jerome expressed his frustration to the madam inwardly.

“...That... I heard it was Milady’s childhood name.”

His master gave no response to that.

Jerome broke out in cold sweat. His master really did not know. He began to get worried as to whether the two of them would have another serious fight like last time.

“Did my wife tell you directly?”

“No, I chanced upon Lady Milton calling Milady by that name so I asked Milady about it.”

“Okay. You may go.”

After Jerome left, the office was quiet and Hugo sat staring at a paper but none of the words on it were entering his brain.

The daughter of Baron Milton knew, Damian knew, even Jerome knew but only he didn’t know.

Hugo was yet again shocked. Her heart was still firmly shut and under lock and key. Perhaps it will keep being so in the future.

[I will never love you]

[There's nothing after it ends.]

He put the pen and paper in his hands down, clasped his head with his hands and let his head drop onto the desk. His chest felt stifled, like there was a huge rock pressing down on it.

It felt like wandering in a desert and the end could not be seen. He found something he wanted for the first time since his brother's death but it was something he could never get.

Perhaps it was comparable to the desperation of a man dying from hunger as he looked at a fruit that was simply out of reach. Even though he took deep breaths, his clogged up chest did not ease up.

After the death of his brother, his world slowly became colorless. It was boring and meaningless. However, he didn't know when it began but recently, he hadn't thought of the world as tiresome.

At some point, his world was full of color and his seemingly stopped heart began beating again. If he were to lose her, his world would die again. As long as she was his wife, she could not leave him.

However, marriage could not bind the heart. No contract in the world could do that. If her heart had not yet been given to another, he could bear it.

However, what if she gave it to someone else? What if she gave her body to him while sharing her heart with another?

He closed his eyes as he hazily sank into the darkness within his mind. The sound of knocking on his door pulled him back into reality.

The one he didn't want to answer the most, Ashin, hurriedly entered his office.

"Your Grace, urgent report on the outbreak of an epidemic."

He sighed. How exhausting. He wasn't even allowed time to get sentimental. The northern land was a very large land so incidents happened without rest.

Just like riding on an old ship with water leakage, when one blocks one of the holes, the water comes in from somewhere else. He barely managed to get his heart that wanted to throw it all way under control and summoned some enthusiasm.

“What epidemic in this weather?”

“Reportedly, dozens of people in the fief complained of the same symptoms and the disease occurred in batches. Since it’s a place that’s only three to four hours away on horse, I didn’t continue monitoring the situation and contacted you.”

Hugo stood up immediately. If it was really epidemic, the consequence of it spreading to Roam would be the worst of worsts.

“I will head out immediately. Have the knights on standby and get physicians that can ride.”

“Understood. Since Sir Philip is opportunely staying in Roam at the moment, shall I request for Sir Philip to get ready?”

Hugo frowned.

“Except that old g... except Philip. Find another doctor.”

Ashin acquiesced and withdrew.

Hugo roughly arranged the documents on his desk and after a while, he left his office. After being informed of this news, Jerome quickly brought his master’s white unnamed horse outside and waited for him.

Hugo urgently ordered one of his hurrying knights to find and bring a doctor along, then he departed first with the rest of his knights.

Chapter 42

Damian (13)

It was a place that held more than a 100 people but it was quiet to the point that even the sound of breathing could not be heard. No one opened their mouth, laughed or touched their cups.

Covered with bright makeup and colorful dresses, these women eerily spotted the same wooden expressions. This all started with the Countess of Wales.

“What seems to be the problem, Countess Wales?”

“I understood today’s party to be one for women. This purpose doesn’t seem to fit that.”

“It is just a child. Although a male child, one cannot say there has been no such precedence. Especially in the capital.”

Lucia replied with special emphasis on the last word. The northern high society could not compare to the capital’s high society whether it was in scale or people.

Even if one brags about being famous in the northern high society, one is simply big fish in a little pond. Lucia chose words that would hurt the Countess’ pride to give her a strong warning. How about withdrawing at this point?

“If you put it that way, then I have nothing else to say.”

The Countess of Wales answered, deliberately displaying a sullen expression. The sly Countess found the Duchess’ provocation about the capital ridiculous.

‘Just as I thought, the Duchess has been hiding her true colors.’

The gentle and docile appearance she showed at tea parties was also a lie. The Countess thought the Duchess acting as though she wasn’t interested in the northern high society was a lie.

To say she had no desire to use her status as the Duchess to control the high society? That was no way she didn't have such desires. Sure enough, she was obviously in the process of passively exploring for now.

'Duchess, if you think you can seize the north high society with just your status as a Duchess, you're heavily mistaken.'

If there was world where status and rank did not have absolute reign, it was the high society. Just like the Queen could not dominate the capital's high society with just her status, the northern high society also couldn't be dominated with just status.

'Becoming a Duchess after being a princess merely appears good.'

If the Duchess thought about it a little more, she would know that much. The Countess held a lot of interest in the capital's high society so she was well-informed on the rumors in the capital and she knew what rumors were currently spreading in the capital about the Duchess.

Not all rumors were true but the Countess knew many things that the northern people did not know. For instance, she knew that the Duchess did not have a single relative and was merely one of the many princesses in the castle.

There was also many suspicious points about her marriage to the Duke. According to a credible rumor source, the King and the Duke had some sort of contract.

When the Countess heard the rumor depicting the Duchess as a celestial beauty, she laughed her head off. She also deemed the rumor that the ducal couple led a happily married life to be a groundless rumor.

The Countess knew of the Taran Duke's female exploits very well. The Duke was never a man to settle for one woman.

'Duchess, if you want to hold on to that seat for long time, you have to keep helpful people by your side. Not that old thing on her last legs.'

The fact that the Countess of Corzan was the first person to meet the Duchess and was requested to teach the Duchess about the high society, was pretty much the topic of discussion in the high society. Due to this, the Countess of Wales was dissatisfied.

Her influence was far superior to the Countess of Corzan yet people looked up to the

Countess of Corzan and called her Godmother.

‘Nothing but an old thing in a back room teaching bridal lessons at best.’

Acting aloof and admonishing while using the reason that she was much older, the very sight of Countess Corzan sickened the Countess of Wales. Not being able to see the Countess of Corzan these days made her feel completely refreshed.

So in today’s garden party, the Countess of Wales intended to highlight her existence to the Duchess, no matter the means and just in the nick of time, the Duchess gave her a very good means.

The moment the young lord appeared, the countess made all her calculations in an instant then she began a silent protest. Her justification being the party’s purpose.

Damian had been announced as the successor to the Duke and it wasn’t something one could not formally question it. Hence, there was no one that did not know that the Countess’ justification was simply just that, a justification.

Beginning with the Countess, the elderly women acted together, the young ladies chatted cluelessly at first but as time passed, they became conscious of their surroundings and followed passively.

It had almost been an hour and a half since the party was declared as started but people sat like dolls without any expression.

Not everyone was in sync. In this situation, Kate appeared very casual, deliberately making loud noises, drinking tea and eating sweets. However, she lacked the ability to overturn the situation alone.

The Countess of Wales was too strong an opponent for Kate. Kate had her great-aunt behind her so she could openly oppose it but the other young ladies could not.

Party-breaking.

It was an event of power struggle between the organizer and the attendees. (1). Or in the case where an organizer commits a mistake that should be socially or ethically criticized, the high society punishes them in the manner of party-breaking.

The method was simple. The attendees would just remain silent.

If the party-break wasn't for the purpose of punishment but for a problem that occurred during the party, until the problem was resolved, the attendees would keep their mouth shut, as if declaring their absence.

When a person began to lead a party-break, unless someone else with similar influence to the leader opposes them, it was the rule that other people would turn a blind eye and follow along.

'If great-aunt was here, it wouldn't have become like this.'

Kate was overwhelmed with regret. Party-breaking was a war for women. There were no deaths or loud cries like in a man's war but at times it was more cruel and bloody.

Also unlike a man's war, in the high society's struggle for power, status and rank were not absolute. If one approaches a situation by throwing down one's status, gradually one would be treated as an outcast in the high society.

Lucia looked over the crowd with a frosty expression. The maids were pale with fright and had crowded themselves in a corner. Contrarily, Damian's expression was the very placid.

Lucia had once witnessed the sight of a party-break occurring in her dream. A party-break was impossible in a very small tea party or in a grand ball where many people, both male and female, were in attendance. It was only plausible in a moderate meeting where only women were in attendance.

The party-break she witnessed happened just like today. From her experience in her dream, there had never been a party-break for rational or reasonable purposes.

A high society faction dispute, a confrontation between women's cliques, a revenge led by the wife to punish the adulterous organizer. These were the reasons for most of them.

Lucia knew the way to conclude a party-break. If the organizer and the attendees appeared to have a plausible reconciliation, the party could finish up safely.

Usually, it was the organizer that took a step back. This was because if one's party fails in the middle, it was a huge disgrace.

The way to resolve this situation was clear. Damian had to be sent out of the party.



The way to resolve this situation was clear. Damian had to be sent out of the party.

However, Lucia had no thoughts of doing so. The Countess of Wales had the wrong idea from the beginning. Lucia held no attachment to the high society. She already had her fill of acting graceful and conversational at social activities in her dream.

Lucia turned to face the crowd and declared in a cool voice.

“Everyone, I’m afraid we cannot have an enjoyable time today. This event is now dismissed.”

The ladies stirred.

“I won’t see you off, you don’t deserve it.”

Then she gave an order to the maids.

“Please show the guests out.”

The maids in the corner straightened up and answered resolutely. The confidence of their madam became the saving grace to the pride of the employees. When the maids began to move around in a bustling manner, the masks of the women broke and they started exchanging glances.

“Today, you have all deceived me, the Duchess and Lady of Taran. You will soon realize that this was not a wise move.”

Lucia’s cold threat did not conform to the rules of the high society. The expression of the older women in particular sank inwardly. However, no one revealed their discomfort.

Even if the Duchess had no influence over the high society, if one were to commit an act that disregarded her rank openly, one had to be fearful of the later consequences.

“Someday, your son or grandson will have my son as their master. I can see the saying of ‘parents ruining the futures of their child’ refers to a case like this.”

Lucia thundered icily then turned around and headed straight for the central tower,

abandoning the crowd. After the Duchess disappeared, the buzzing of the ladies grew louder.

“Ah? What in the world is this?”

“Tell me about it, I didn’t think about the aftermath and just committed.”

“The Duchess is not the usual type to get angry. It’s scary when a normally gentle person gets angry. What should we do?”

The criticism was concentrated on 10 elderly women including the Countess of Wales who led the party-break. Ignoring their faults in following along, they shifted the blame to another, despite this pathetic behavior, they didn’t dare to voice their criticism to the Countess of Wales.

“Keu-heum.” (*TN: Clearing of throat*)

As the recipients of those uncomfortable gazes, the leaders were the first to leave with sour expressions.

The Countess of Wales’ expression stiffened.

‘It shouldn’t have turned out this way, why...’

This was because the Countess had purposefully tried to calculate the probable outcomes of the party-break. Even if one is seasoned and experienced in socializing, when actually faced with a party-break, one would fall into confusion.

The Countess saw that the newly married young Duchess had little experience in the high societal socializing and thought that she would be unlikely to know what a party-break was.

The Countess thought that the Duchess would be flustered and would surely send the young lord out to fix the situation. After all, the young lord was not the Duchess’ biological son.

When the Countess heard one day that the Duchess was carrying the Duke’s extramarital child and going around, she thought it to be impressive.

To her, the ducal couple was a couple in appearances only.

There was no doubt that the Duchess thought of securing her place as the Duchess using the young lord, hence Duchess' comely actions to the young lord were not sincere.

After all, which sane women would do something to block the future of their unborn child?

She was deliberately trying to figure out what the Duchess' hidden intentions were, so using the fact that she was young and inexperienced, she spoke cynically. It made people think that the Duchess was unhappy with the act of bringing the illegitimate child of the Duke around with her.

It was amateurish to think that a relationship between one person and another could only be achieved through meeting face to face and having intimate conversations. A true pro is one that know the heart of another without meeting face to face.

When party break happens, the Duchess would be unable to win and would have taken a step back first. Initially, her pride would be hurt and she would fume with anger however as time goes by, she would realize that the incident was not too bad.

In the view of others, the Duchess had done her best. She was humiliated in trying to defend an extramarital child, so no matter how one looked at it, she was be a generous mother with ample tolerance.

When the Duchess' mind calmed down, the Countess would then lessen herself and secretly swoop in. After which the hurt pride of the Duchess would be restored and they would be able to cultivate a close relationship. This was all the Countess of Wales had calculated inwardly.

However, the Countess' biggest mistake was not properly understanding what kind of person Lucia was. No matter how often the two of them met, the Countess and Lucia could not fully understand each other. The thoughts and beliefs of the two were inextricably parallel.

The tycoon of the northern high society who seemed to have shot herself in the foot by taking it a few moves too far was now putting her brain to work.

(TN: Random gossip)

“What should I do? If my husband finds out about this, he'll give me a hard time.”

“Look at the place to lie before stretching your legs. You know very well what kind of person the Duke of Taran is, so why did you do it?”

“It’s a social thing for women. It’s not the case for a man to meddle.”

“Does everything always follow the same principle? Rumor has it the ducal couple’s conjugal relationship is pretty good. If a woman whispers coquettishly, can any man resist?”

“Ah, I don’t know. I’ll have to refuse any outings and stay quiet for a while.”

“Why ever did Countess Wales flare up over the Duke’s heir like that?”

“Did you not know? The Count of Wales took in an extramarital daughter like that and went around with her. In the end, the extramarital daughter was married off to the Count.”

“Oh my, then the Count and the daughter of the in-laws...”

“The funny thing is, the Countess of Wales squeezed out some tears from her daughter-in-law and then not long after, two extramarital grandsons were entered into the family register.”

“My goodness.”

Damian watched with cold red eyes, saving the actions of the noble ladies with his eyes and ears. Today, the boy graphically witnessed the figures of those he had to step on to advance in the future.

It was a completely different direction from what Lucia had hoped for but it was a great lesson anyways.

Some women unintentionally locked eyes with Damian, causing them to flinch and turn away. After clamoring in groups, the remaining women began to depart from their seats.

When the number of people in the garden decreased a lot, Damian also left the event.

Chapter 43

Damian (14)

Lucia entered the central tower and checked behind her. The Damian who said he would be following shortly was nowhere to be found.

She asked a maid to fetch him and went into the receiving room. She sat down, placed her head on the sofa and closed her eyes. Her head was hurting.

‘I was too complacent. To think it would be a party-break.’

She thought too lightly of the women’s stubborn pride that wouldn’t break even if their neck was snapped. She let her guard down at the fact that the atmosphere here was distinctly different from the one in the capital’s social circles.

She also might have been conceited about the fact that she was a Duchess without even realizing it. Even though she knew that in the high society, one’s reputation and personal connection accumulated over the years was much more important than status, she had foolishly overlooked it.

‘From the first time I saw that woman, I didn’t really like her.’

Lucia was deeply impressed by the character of Countess Corzan, the godmother of the northern high society so she had high expectations before meeting the Countess of Wales, whose influence was much greater. However, her expectations quickly turned into disappointment.

In Lucia’s eyes, the countess of Wales that was invited to her tea party a couple of times was like a snake in human skin.

It was a mistake to just smile in the past because she wanted to avoid unnecessary confrontation. Because now, the countess took her to be a joke and led this kind of thing.

‘Although I knew it wouldn’t be easy.’

Which is why she'd asked Kate to definitely bring the Countess of Corzan if possible. She wanted to have a safety shield. There was no way the countess wouldn't know how to build up a frontal confrontation when faced with a party break. Her mistake of not being careful was painful.

'Is Countess Wales wrathful because of her extramarital issues?'

It would be too shallow to just see it as a crafty high society greeting. If she particularly wanted to humiliate Lucia using the party-break, she had a lot more to lose than to gain from it.

Even if one's status was not absolute in the high society, status could never be ignored. Moreover, the Duke of Taran's absolute influence in the north was not inferior to that of the King's in the capital.

The Countess of Wales wouldn't have thought to do such a thing if she hadn't assumed what was in Lucia's mind and calculated off of that.

One villain recognizes another. No matter how much Lucia observed the behavior of groups in the high society, she did not have a mind twisted enough to grasp the psychology of the people who were capable of scheming and conspiring.

'A person's actions can't be judged with only rationality.'

It was unprecedented that an illegitimate child entered into the family was selected as a candidate. Lucia began to mull over the problem a bit more seriously.

'If the northern atmosphere is like this then the capital's must be formidable as well.'

She wondered if he had any idea on how to resolve this issue. Seeing as he didn't think bringing Damian to social party was a big deal, he may not have any ideas.

'Damian taking over the title may the beginning of a different flow in the future. That's probably why people are resistant.'

She was too hasty. She didn't want to miss this chance since Damian might soon be going back to the Academy. She introduced Damian at the horse riding field and took it lightly because the garden party could not be Damian's formal social debut.

She opened her eyes and checked around but Damian was still nowhere to be found.

‘Hasn’t it been a while since I asked the maid to get him?’

The headache was making her irritated. She called for another maid.

“Why is it taking so long to fetch the young lord?”

The maid immediately left in haste then returned after a while.

“Milady, the young master did not answer when asked to come in. The one who receive Milady’s order first is by the young master’s side not knowing what to do.”

“What is Damian doing outside?”

“Nothing... just looking at people.”

“...Alright.”

What could the child be thinking as he watched those people? She had to ask him when he came in.

Lucia closed her eyes again.

“Lucia.”

At some point, Kate had entered and was sitting next to Lucia, holding her hand. Lucia opened her eyes and seeing Kate, she gave her a smile.

“Thank you for today, Kate.”

“No, I was of no help at all. Don’t be too upset. By all means, just think of it as a rite of passage.”

Kate was worried that Lucia would be overcome with shame because of her broken pride. However, Lucia did not care about things like an organizer’s pride. Even though it was in her dream, she had worked as a nursing maid for a noblewoman. This type of thing wasn’t enough for her pride to feel humiliated.

“It’s okay. And I’m sorry Kate but do you mind going back for today? I have a lot to think about.”

Kate replied that she understood, spoke a few more words of warmth and comfort then left.

Lucia called Jerome who was continuously lingering around.

“Is he in the office?”

“No. An urgent message arrived and master had to head out. There was no definitive reply as to whether master would return today.”

Lucia felt both slightly sad and relieved at the same time.

“I will inform him of today’s matter so don’t tell him directly.”

“Yes, Milady”

“Also, will you call Anna for me?”

The headache was getting worse so she thought to have some medicine. After Jerome went out, Lucia sent all the maids away.

She looked at Damian who had come in some moments ago and beckoned him over.

“Damian, come here.”

Damian approached and went on his knees before Lucia. Lucia sprang up in surprise.

“I’m sorry. Because of me...” (Damian)

The boy did not care how others looked at him. No matter how intense the unfriendly gazes were, they did not cause any direct harm. However, he didn’t want them to send such gazes to Lucia.

Damian didn’t know the high society very well, neither did he know what a party-break was but he knew the earlier situation had humiliated Lucia.

Anger. He felt anger at his weakness. The situation would have turned out completely different if his father was there.

“No, Damian. Why do you have to apologize?”

Lucia felt tears threaten to break out and reach out to lift Damian, taking him into her embrace. Damian said he didn't like it from the beginning, she was the one that persuaded him and eventually the result was such.

'I should have gone about it a different way. It would have been okay to introduce him just about when the party was finishing but I was too greedy.'

"I'm sorry, Damian. I didn't think of you. I didn't think that you could be hurt and only thought of myself."

As he liked the nice fragrance and soft feeling of the embrace, Damian was holding his breath and doing his best to stay still. He thought if he moved even a little bit, Lucia would be surprised and move away.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry." (Lucia)

"I... It's all right."

Damian was really fine. He had completely forgotten about the meaningless gazes of those women that didn't know anything the moment Lucia said, 'my son,' earlier. The words were still replaying in the boy's head and touched his heart.

"It's not your fault, Damian. What people do is not your fault. Adults are not all wise."

Lucia's voice grew shaky at the end. At the sound of small sobbing, Damian stiffened.

'Don't cry because of me,' the words in head were stuck in his throat, refusing to come out. Little by little, he carefully inched forward, placing his forehead on Lucia's shoulders.

It was the first time someone cried for the sake of the boy. His throat felt as though it was hot and constricted, and his eyes felt flushed.

It was just a little. But the boy's eyes were wet.

Translator's Corner

*extramarital= out-of-wedlock. Think concubine's child except not a concubine. Most of you guys know this but still.

What ended up happening was different from what Hugo was worried about. It was not a mass epidemic but a mass food poisoning. In this weather, whether it was an epidemic or food poisoning, both of these weren't common occurrences but the Duke didn't have to come in person.

The expression of the village lord that sent the report and hence wasted the Duke's time was dark.

"A poisonous mushroom?" (Hugo)

"Yes, your Grace. This mushroom looks edible on the outside but once eaten, it causes stomachache, diarrhea, vomiting and red spots all over the body."

As soon as the doctor familiar with poisonous herbs and poisonous mushrooms was brought in, he looked at some patients, asked a few questions then found the mushroom in the remaining food reserves. In a short moment, the problem was instantly resolved.

The villagers who were shaken by the fear of an epidemic were frightened out of their wits by the sudden appearance of the big-shot Duke however when the issue was resolved within a couple hours of the Duke's arrival, their expression changed to that of wonder.

Their gazes were full of awe as they looked at the Duke inwardly saying to themselves, 'as expected, that's our Duke.'

"If the mushroom is from around here, there's no way the people wouldn't know about it."

"Yes, your Grace. This mushroom is not one to inhabit this area. One has to go a bit more to the north with colder climate."

"How did this happen?" (Hugo)

"Speak truthfully." (Village Lord)

In response to Hugo's question, the village lord urged an old man that was tied up with a rope and prostrated on the floor. The old man was a shop owner that ran a food store

in the village and was the one to supply the mushrooms.

“Yes... yes... Uh... a few days ago, I bought a large quantity of food stuff through the upper channels but I don’t know what happened...”

“Enough. You made this situation happen, did you not? What feelings in the world did you have to unleash poisonous mushrooms on your people?”

“Ai! I’m innocent, my lord. This one would never do such a thing on purpose.”

As the Duke watched the situation unfold with the old man tearfully expressing his innocence with a runny nose, an official came to report to him.

“I think the upper channels will have to be placed under watch and tracked. The mushrooms cannot be distinguished properly hence one cannot tell if the supply is indiscriminate.”

“Dispatch and track immediately. Investigate along the upper levels to see if they have suffered any similar damage. The doctor will remain behind and treat the patients. Collect all the mushrooms discovered in the village and dispose of them.”

“Yessir!”

Responses came from all over the place.

“Your Grace, I made a mistake judging the situation and have caused you unnecessary trouble.”

The village lord apologized somberly.

“No, the quick reaction was excellent.”

The expression of the lord that had readied himself to receive the Duke’s wrath brightened considerably.

“Deal with the rest of this.”

“Yes, your Grace.”

There was nothing else to see in the village. Although their horse riding for three hours

straight ended up in vain, the situation here was much better than an epidemic occurring.

Hugo and his Knights left for Roam, leaving a few people to handle the remaining affairs. The day was getting darker. When they weren't too far from Roam, Hugo and his Knights gathered around a small fountain to quench the thirst of both horse and man.

Hugo took a guess at the time and by his estimate, by the time they reached Roam, it would be quite dark. It was likely that dinner time would be adjusted or it would be a little later than that.

Hugo called for Dean.

"Go ahead and tell them not to blow the horns when I arrive."

It would be good if he could arrive before the meal began but if he was a little late, he didn't want her come out and meet him during her meal. Dean received his orders and departed earlier. After a while, Hugo and his Knight took their horses and began heading back en masse.

They ran without rest and arrived at Roam. Hugo rode his horse all the way inside the castle before stopping. One of the servants was surprised to see Hugo coming down from his horse and quickly ran inside. After a while, Jerome came running out.

"Your Grace arrived the castle yet there was no announcement..."

"I told them not to make a fuss."

Hugo immediately started heading to his office followed by Jerome. After a while, the three siblings dedicated to serving the Duke came into the office with a change of clothes. They waited on Hugo as he changed out of his dusty clothes.

"What about dinner?" (Hugo)

"It's almost ready." (Jerome)

"I didn't come late then."

Hugo went straight to his desk and sat down. There were several documents laid out

for him to look through. There were also documents in the corner, marked red for urgency.

‘No time to breathe,’ he muttered to himself as he picked up a document and opened it.

“Did the garden party go well?”

Because of the party, the atmosphere in the castle was gloomy all day. Remembering the words of the madam telling him to say anything directly, Jerome replied,

“Yes.”

“Call me when dinner is ready.”

Hugo leaned halfway across his desk, his butt sitting halfway on his chair and began to read through the document.



Lucia slept off after taking the headache medicine and when she woke up she continued to remain lying on the sofa. Even though she took some medicine before she slept, the headache hadn’t eased up.

Her throbbing head was irritating and she didn’t feel well so Lucia lay sniveling and unmoving on the bedroom sofa.

Around when dinner was almost ready, her headache had settled down so she began to move then a maid came in to tell her that the Duke had returned.

“What? He’s back?”

Lucia thought he wouldn’t be returning today. She asked the maid to bring a mirror and as expected, her eyes were swollen. If she knew it would be like this, she would have placed a pack on her eyes.

“Bring me a cold towel.”

Lucia could only use this as a temporary measure. However, there was not a lot of time. It was announced that dinner would be out very soon.

“How is it? Do my eyes look very bad?”

“It has settled down a lot better than before. At first glance, one cannot tell.”

If he didn't notice during dinner then it was fine. After dinner, he would be going back to his office after all he usually got busier when he returned from an outing. She kept the towel for a bit longer, hoping that her eyes would settle down a bit more. She didn't want him to know that she cried for nothing.

When she went down to the dining hall, Damian was already there. Hugo came in a little later and sat down. Hugo picked up his spoon and his gaze naturally fell on her. His forehead wrinkled and his hand froze.

As soon as he placed the spoon down loudly on the table, the atmosphere in the dining hall froze over. He swiftly got up and approached her figure that was looking rather embarrassed.

His one hand clutched the table while his other hand held her jaw to face him. Her reddened eyes were clearly revealed to him. His gaze deepened and his eyes looked like they would burst into flames.

“What happened?” (Hugo)

Lucia was conscious of the surrounding gazes on her and naturally turned her head, dropping her gaze. She didn't know he would react like this. She thought that even if he noticed something he would ask her questions later. She was deeply embarrassed because the employees as well as Damian were in the room.

“Let's eat first...”

He firmly grabbed her chin again and lifted her head backward to look over more carefully. Her clear amber eyes were heavily red. Did she cry? Why?

“Jerome!”

The always ready butler, Jerome, gave his master the answer he wanted.

“At the garden party, the ladies performed a party-break.”

“Party break?”

“It is an act of artificially ending a party where many of the attendees keep silent.”

“Reason.”

“...Young Master Damian.”

Hugo didn't need to hear any more, he could roughly grasp the situation.

“What did they do to you?”

There was violence within his soft voice.

“Nothi... didn't do anything...”

They merely rejected the party with blank expressions and silence but didn't do anything to her directly. She didn't feel displeased at all and it wasn't enough to make her cry. It was just that she felt sorry to Damian and was crying because she was upset. She had also already cried to her heart's content.

However the moment he asked her what happened, her nose got sore. It was the same principle as tears coming to one's eyes when seeing someone else tear up. She was going to calmly explain to him the events that transpired when he came back but his words were bringing her to tears.

Hugo's expression stiffened as he watched tears begin to fill her eyes. He lifted her from her seat and took her into his arms. Like carrying a child, one arm supported her thighs while his other arm was wrapped around her back so her head could be buried in his chest.

“Move our dinner to the second floor. Damian, eat and go to your room.”

“Okay.”

Damian looked on worriedly as the Duke carried Lucia out of the dining hall in his embrace. He was worried about Lucia who hadn't come out of her room almost all day and his heart felt uncomfortable all day long.

Damian hoped to see his mother smiling just as usual when tomorrow comes.

Chapter 44

Damian (15)

Hugo carried her in a hug as he entered the bedroom and sat on the couch. Lucia buried her face in his wide chest and burst into tears.

Hugo stroked her head as he rhythmically patted her back. Her sobbing did not stop, rather it grew even louder. The crying was not only because of the garden party. Lucie herself did not even know why she was crying so much.

She was just sad, and in the face of his gentle comfort, her tears refused to stop flowing. She hadn't been able to cry since she entered the palace at the age of 12 and crying so much now was as though she was washing all that away.

Hugo gently stroked her back without saying a word however he was seething inside. Even though she seemed weak, he knew just how strong of a person she was. What in the world could have happen for her to cry like this?

Those wives that have nothing to do with their time must have lost their minds. To his woman that was too precious to even touch, they dare? He will make them regret it. His deep rage was continuously increasing.

After a long period of time, Lucia leaned forward in his arms and her crying was starting to come to an end. Hugo simply hugged her, not saying any comforting words or telling her not to cry, however, she felt a lot of comfort from his attitude.

Lucia lifted her head, fixing her gaze on him and he looked down, meeting her eyes.

"No more crying?"

Lucia felt more or less embarrassed as she nodded her head. After crying like that with no restraint, she felt somewhat lighthearted.

"I have to... wash up..."

She felt ashamed to show him her face smeared full of tears. He grabbed her as she

tried to get up and held out a wet towel. Lucia did not know because she was crying but in the meantime, a maid had come in and tactfully placed it by the side. She took the towel and meticulously wiped her face then she looked down and found the front of his shirt wet from all her crying.

“It’s wet... because of me.”

Lucia hesitated for a moment then she reached out and unfastened a button on his shirt.

As she unfastened it one by one, his well-defined chest muscles were gradually revealed and her hands began to tremble more and more. When she got to the middle, her heart was pounding too hard and she took her hand off.

“Bring a change of clothes...”

Hugo grabbed her wrists mid-speech. She looked at him in surprise and found his eyes shining dangerously.

“Finish taking it off.” (Hugo)

She glared at him with trembling eyes then she swallowed hard, and reached out to unfasten the rest of his buttons with shaky hands.

When the last button was undone, she subconsciously swept her hands across his naked chest. She was impressed by the firmness of his skin and her heart throbbed at the sight of his refined and beautiful muscles.

Suddenly, shame washed over her and she quickly took her hands off and began to turn around as if to get up but his hands were faster as they moved to catch hers. His lips quickly met hers and his tongue swept over her lips then he smacked his lips as though mulling over the taste.

“Salty.”

Lucia’s face instantly turned red. There was an obvious spark in his red eyes that were fixed on her. His always passionate and wanting gaze was glued onto her and her body reacted sensitively to this gaze.

It was a cute and innocent reaction to the extent of a loud pounding heart. Her body

felt hot, her breathing quickened and the deep part between her legs felt electrified.

As she gazed into his red eyes, she recalled once thinking that the red color was very cold. However, she couldn't remember when she had that thought. At some point, his gazes on her had become heated all the time.

'Does he... always look at women he's in the bedroom with this way?'

She recalled the scene of Sophia Lawrence desperately clinging to him. 'It's not like the Duke of Taran is the only man left in the world', she had mumbled to herself and clicked her tongue. That's why they say, 'the world is full of things one doesn't know and one shouldn't put their mouth in other people's businesses'.

She didn't think a day would come where she could understand Sofia Lawrence's feelings like this. She wondered if there was any woman who could receive such a gaze and bear it when it suddenly turns cold. As time went on, her love of him gradually grew bigger and bigger.

Her determination to love him and not hope for a requital was strangely shaken the more tenderly he treated her. She was afraid that one day she would become the type of clingy woman that he despised.

'It's fine like this.'

For now, she was happy enough. He was a very tender and passionate husband. To ask for more would be greedy. In this way, she comforted herself.

Lucia placed both hands on his shoulders and pushed down, using it to propel her body upwards. As his eyes were fixated on her, his head naturally went up to meet her eyes. The feeling of looking down on him from above gave her a strange and odd sense of superiority.

She pressed down more on his shoulders and lowered her head to kiss him. She gently bit his lower lips like he always did to her and licked his lips with her tongue. Soon enough, the carefully started kisses gradually became provocative. Because he stayed still, she acted more lively in rubbing over his lips.

When their lips separated, the embarrassment from what she just did seemed to flood over her and the heat from her face spread throughout her body.

“You haven’t eaten because of me. You must be hungry...”

Before her sentence could finish, he grabbed her neck and greedily devoured her lips. Her lips were swallowed at once and his tongue dove into her mouth. As his tongue rummaged the inside her mouth without reserve, her hands grabbing onto the collars of his shirt trembled.

The kiss was long enough to leave her breathless. When he moved away, she began to gasp for air.

“You’re talking about food now?”

After stirring me up like this? He growled, feeling the heat in his body rising.

“...I’m hungry too.” (Lucia)

Hugo sighed heavily. Although it didn’t matter to him if he didn’t eat once or twice...

“...Can’t have you go hungry.” (Hugo)

Hugo carried her like that and went out into the drawing room connected to the bedroom. There were meals for two people already set out on the table. The meal was over shortly.

Lucia, the hungry one, couldn’t eat any more and lay down the fork. Around the same time, Hugo also finished his meal.



Lucia called the maid and asked for a change of clothes to be brought for him. For a while, she sat on the sofa, completely absorbed in watching him as he changed out of his shirt. Looking at his revealed upper body, she fell into delusions.

Just like how he caresses and licks all over her body, she wanted to lay him down and taste him. When such a thought arose in her mind, she was startled and jumped in surprise.

‘You really are crazy.’

It was fortunate that no one could look into her head. While she was adjusting her

breath to calm her pounding heart down, Hugo came up and sat beside her on the sofa.

“Still not feeling well?”

“No, I’m fine.”

Lucia leaned her head on his shoulder. His arms went across, lightly grabbing her shoulders and wrapping his arms around her.

“Thanks to you, it’s okay now. After crying so much, I feel quite refreshed. Have you ever had such an experience?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never cried before.”

When his brother died, he felt like his heart was being ripped out so he ran away from his horse to be alone and screamed, however no tears fell from his eyes.

Lucia was not surprised to hear that he had never cried. Since it was him, it was quite reasonable.

“Now, tell me. What happened?” (Hugo)

“...Just as you heard earlier. The garden party was a mess due to the party-break. The guests were displeased at my introduction of Damian, but I did not want to concede, so I simply dismissed the party. It’s something that often happens in high society.”

“If it’s a common thing, why did you cry your eyes out?”

“That... wasn’t just because of the party. I was a little upset because I felt that Damian was hurt by my wrong judgement of the situation.”

Does one cry till they’re exhausted because they feel a little upset? Hugo could not understand her psychology behind bursting into tears so even though he wasn’t convinced, he let it pass.

“The boy is not that weak.”

“Yes. He is your son, after all. But he’s still only eight years old. He’s young.”

“Who was the initiator?”

Ferocity lay hidden beneath his soft and calm tone. From deep within his red eyes, brutality overflowed as if he would pounce and rip someone's throat out in an instant. The normally hidden nature of Hugh was awakened. He felt the desire to find the person who gave her pain and make them taste blood.

The savage beast in his eyes hid itself the moment Lucia lifted her head.

"Don't do anything." (Lucia)

"...Don't do what?"

"High society is a woman's matter. You shouldn't interfere."

If he interfered, it would be utter chaos. The very foundation of the northern high society would be shaken. If such a situation occurred, not only Madam Michelle, even Kate could turn their backs on her.

"..."

When he became sullen and did not reply, Lucia appealed to him.

"Please promise me. Promise me that you won't interfere with this."

"I'll take care of it."

"Hugh! No, don't do this for me. I won't blame you nor will fingers be pointed at me."

"Who dares?"

"Hugh!"

He couldn't resist the sight of her quivering eyes as she implored him.

"...Okay."

"You promise?"

"I said okay."

Inwardly, he was grumbling. He didn't want to idle around and do nothing. She didn't

have the heart to completely step on them till they couldn't make a sound.

Hugo didn't know about other things but he was very confident in crushing people under his feet. However, he couldn't even show that off to her and prove his skill.

"What are you going to do?" (Hugo)

"I'm still thinking. I don't plan on having a hasty retaliation." (Lucia)

"You don't plan on letting it cool down and blow over, right?"

"I'm not a fool to overcome this by remaining silent. I'll deal with it nicely, don't worry."

"What's so complicated? Bring a few instigated..."

Lucia's head abruptly shot upright, revealing narrowed eyes and Hugo closed his mouth.

"I'm saying this again, but don't ever do something like that. This is different from men's. The world of women is not that simple."

Whether man or a woman, they both die when they lose their neck so Hugo couldn't understand why it was so complicated. However, he obediently replied that he understood. It was somehow terrifying to see his docile wife looking so aggressive.

"So you really don't need my help." (Hugo)

She looked really energetic. Even if he didn't want it to the extent of clinging and whimpering about it, he would like it if she complained to him.

"I will tell you if I need it." (Lucia)

Hugo couldn't help but wonder if such a day would come. He felt bitter as he'd seemingly once again confirmed that she would be completely fine, living without him.

"Why didn't you ever ask about Damian before he came?"

Argumentatively, the cause of the garden party situation was Damian. Hugo had known that she thought the child to be cute but it seemed that her feelings towards the child were much deeper than he thought. That's why it was surprising.

Until recently, he thought she held no interest in Damian because she'd never asked him anything about the child.

"You never mentioned the child to me first so I didn't think I should talk about the child." (Lucia)

"Why?"

"The day I went to find you in the Capital, you warned me when I mentioned Damian."

"...Did I?"

"And I knew that even if I asked out of pure curiosity, it would be hard to see my intentions as pure. It is likely that if I had asked about details on Damian, you would have wondered what my intentions were."

"..."

Hugo was thrown off guard and couldn't say anything. She was right. If she had shown interest in Damian shortly after they married, he wouldn't have taken it as a natural interest. Even though her personality wasn't one to keep everything locked inside, her considerations were deeper than he'd thought.

"I called Damian back because of the status elevation process."

"That hasn't been processed yet? Is there perhaps, something else I need to do?"

"There is no such problem but since he's becoming your legal son, I thought you should at least know the boy's face. And no matter how long ago I was provided the documents, I won't process it without talking to you."

Lucia's eyes grew round as she stared at him. He looked somewhat disgruntled.

"I know what you're going to say. You're going to say you thought I would handle it without asking you, right?"

Lucia gave a slightly bashful smile. Hugo sighed.

"That's right. I am a rogue. I know you think so."

Lucia felt somewhat sorry as she looked at his slightly crestfallen appearance.

“...I don’t think of you like that. Really.”

“...Then what do you think of me?”

“You are a very competent lord. Before I came here, I didn’t know the north was such a comfortable and steady place to live in.”

“Is that so.”

He replied dryly. Her praise wasn’t very pleasing. A competent lord? Those words weren’t the ones he wanted to hear from her.

Chapter 45

Damian (16)

"The family registering process isn't that complicated so it should be done within a day or two."

"I see..."

Lucia's heart fluttered. Damian was really becoming her son. Now that Damian was on the register, he was family now. It wasn't an adoption but an entry as a biological child so their relationship couldn't be dissolved.

Even if she divorced her husband, her son in the family register was forever her son. She couldn't claim custody rights over Damian as she had already handed over those right but whether or not she had those rights would not affect their mother-son relationship.

"He's my son..."

"That is correct. He's you son so you can do as you like. Can bully him if you want."

"...Hah? You are such a bad father."

Lucia's eyes widened and she criticized him.

"What?"

"Are you trying to persuade me to be the evil stepmother now?"

Her word choice made him laugh.

"Do you have the ability to be hard on him?" (Hugo)

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it'll be the boy causing you distress instead."

“Damian will not cause me distress. You still don’t know Damian, he’s such a nice child.”

Hugo chuckled lightly. Even if the boy looked meek and docile, he was of Taran blood. His brother seemed like the kindest person one could ever meet but had enough malice to murder his biological father.

“Plus he’s your son.”

Lucia thought she had mumbled that to herself but when he fixed an odd gaze on her, she realized she had spoken out loud.

“...to whom do you have faith in?” (Hugo)

“...Damian... who is very much... like you.” (Lucia)

He moved closer placing his head close to Lucia’s face. Then he spoke in a subdued tone as though making a threat.

“If he is like me then you should be more careful. Haven’t you heard the rumors about me?”

“...rumors that you drink blood?”

“...What?”

Lucia was flustered. She didn’t mean to say that but the words suddenly escaped from her mouth.

“Ah, erm... I mean... the rumors of you...”

“Say that I drink blood?”

Hugo studied her face as she nodded her head then he turned towards her, took her into his arms and buried his head in her shoulder. Then he began to laugh.

Thanks to Fabian’s constant reports, Hugo knew all sorts of rumors concerning himself but as for someone telling him directly that he drinks blood? She was the first.

“I know it’s just a rumor.”

Lucia's face was burning with shame and she gave an excuse.

"It's not completely a lie. When at war, sometimes one has no choice but to take it in."

"Ah... I see..."

"Were you curious about that?"

"No... maybe a little... but that was a long time ago. I definitely don't think about that now."

He just kept on laughing. Lucia was glad he wasn't offended but she didn't think her words were that funny. She just couldn't understand his laughing code.

"What of other rumors?"

"...I don't know."

"You are really such a daring woman. What were you thinking asking a blood-drinking monster to marry you?"

Listening to his teasing, Lucia blushed in silence. Since she was the one that misspoke, she couldn't say anything.

"Is it really okay if I meddle with things concerning Damian?"

"Do as you like."

"You told me not to last time."

"When did I?"

"You said, 'Although it's nice and cute, don't go over the line.'"

"Like I said, when did I?"

Lucia blinked, studying his expression which had 'what in the world are you talking about?' written all over it. His expression was telling her that he really had never said that before.

Lucia carefully scoured her memory. When she thought about it, he really did not use the expression 'go over the line'. But he did say something like that.

She'd had a hunch about something and had been wanting to ask and she finally realized that instead of guessing his thoughts or words, it would be much better to just ask him outright.

"By any chance... do you hate Damian?" (Lucia)

"I do not."

Lucia gathered her courage and asked this question very carefully and in return he answered very readily.

"Then... why did you send Damian to boarding school?"

"I already told you. I couldn't take care of him so I sent him there."

"But still, there hasn't been a precedence of one being sent to boarding school. Moreover, one that is a duke's heir."

"I don't care what others do."

"...What you mean is that you determined that to be the best course of action to take."

Hugo nodded.

Lucia felt as though something had been lifted off her chest. Like she'd been wandering in the dark and her fingers finally grasped onto something.

'I think... I know about him a little bit more now.'

When one thought about it, when Lucia asked, he did not delve into a generous explanation but most of his answers were concise.

"Why did you send Damian to boarding school and not contact him once?"

"A report on what the boy does arrives on my desk every week so I know he's doing fine."

It was fascinating. His incomprehensible actions all had a reason behind them and when she asked, he told her everything.

Lucia's mind was racing. To what extent would he keep answering? Would it be okay to ask a little more difficult questions?

"Then..."

He lowered his head, biting her neck and she let out a little scream in response.

"Can you stop talking about another man?"

"...What? He's your son, an eight year old child. He's not a man!"

"So ruthless. Do you know how much those words have crushed the boy's pride?"

"...Goodness me. I was too rash."

Even though Damian was a child, he was a boy. If she were to change positions with the young boy and put herself in his shoes and someone were to tell her, 'since you're young, you are definitely not a lady', her feelings would be hurt.

It was unintentional but she couldn't help but wonder how much she must've hurt Damian's feelings.

"Truly this child. He could speak his mind and tell me he didn't like it."

When she thought about it, Damian wasn't the type of child speak up on something like that. Then, could it be that he told Hugo? When did their relationship become so close?

"Did Damian say so?"

"No."

"How do you know then?"

"If I were in his position, that's how I'd be."

Lucia narrowed her eyes at him. But he wasn't wrong. Since he's a man, he would

understand the male mind better. Lucia began to wonder if she'd made any other mistake with Damian. In the meantime, Hugo's hand kept wandering around.

His sneaky hands fumbled across her waist, while his lips trailed persistent but light kisses from her ear to her neck.

"You should get back to work."

At the same time, her words came out spoiling his exploration and his expression crumpled intensely.

"You went out due to an urgent matter, didn't you? And after you return from outings, you get busier."

"..."



Hugo's expression was full of obvious complaints but Lucia simply took his hands off her waist and stood up. She knew what he wanted but she was exhausted all day due to a number of reasons and had no confidence in handling him right now.

"Vivian."

"My head feels a little heavy so I want to take a walk."

Hugo tries a few more times but was turned down so he eventually headed to his office with unwilling steps. He hadn't found work enjoyable before but today, he really did not want to work.

He didn't comfort her in hopes of being rewarded but still it wasn't right to repay one for one's services in this way. He continued grumbling till he reached his office.



Later that night, Lucia said to the man who came into her bedroom after she finished bathing.

"Go to your bedroom and sleep."

“Today again? Why!” (Hugo)

Lucia stared at her complaining husband.

“I have no energy so I won’t be able to handle you today. Hence, I don’t think it’ll be quite enjoyable.”

I have no energy. It won’t be enjoyable. Two times, she mercilessly and consecutively struck him down.

“...Alright. Fine. Today again, I’ll sleep next to you, won’t do anything.”

He muttered gloomily. Those damned noblewives. They definitely won’t be getting off easy. He ground his teeth in anger.

“Really?”

“I kept my promise yesterday, didn’t I?.”

All the more reason not to believe. Her gaze was telling him that she didn’t believe him at all. Hugo abruptly took her into his arms and fell onto the bed with her in tow.

“Hugh!”

He hugged her tighter the more she flounced around.

“I’m sleeping like this. Enough, stay still. You’ll get me excited if you keep moving.” (Hugo)

“Where are you touching!” (Lucia)

After tossing around for a while with no result, Lucia finally went silent. She couldn’t even fidget because he was hugging her very tightly from the back. His hands gallantly slid into her nightwear and squeezed her breasts. Even if she asked him to remove his hand, he would act like he didn’t hear anything so she just gave up.

“Vivian.”

It was especially nice to hear him calling her name right next to her ear. Lucia’s lips curled slightly.

“Yes.”

“Vivian.”

“Yes.”

Again, he said,

“Vivian.”

And this time, Lucia said,

“Yes?”

And turned to look at him, her gaze asking why he was doing that.

“When I first called you by that name, you felt awkward, right?”

“Mm... Yes. I did.”

“When I call you now, you’re unaffected.”

“Well, yes, I’ve been hearing it for a while so I’ve gotten used to it.”

Now, Lucia did not hate the name ‘Vivian’ as before. The name of the Duke of Taran’s wife was Vivian, not Lucia. She had found new happiness in her life as Vivian. The life of Vivian that was full of pain ended within her dream.

When he called her ‘Vivian’, it made her feel like she was his one and only ‘Vivian’ and her heart would throb. He was the only one that could call her Vivian. Whether that was now or in the future.

“...Is that so?” (Hugo)

Why didn’t you tell me your childhood name? Hugo wanted to ask. However, he was afraid to hear the answer to that question. If she said something like ‘I didn’t want to.’ Or ‘Don’t call me by that name.’ his heart would sink.

‘You don’t hate me, do you?’

‘Or it is that we’re married so you simply tolerate being with me in bed?’

‘Is there absolutely no leeway in your decision to never love me?’

All the things he wanted to ask suddenly rose up in his throat, hovering at the tip of his tongue. It was a very strange and unfamiliar experience of holding back the words he wanted to say in his heart. He was afraid to hear the answers that could come out from her mouth.

[I will never fall in love with you]

He felt like if he heard those words one more time, he would lose his mind. He dreaded the thought of not knowing what he would do to her if he lost his mind. If he were to hurt her in any way then he would really go crazy.

“Vivian.”

He held her even tighter and buried his nose in her back. He loved her scent that always intoxicated him and drew himself closer to her skin.

“Yes...”

It was strange. Even though he was holding her, it felt like he had lost her forever. His chest was overwhelmed with pain causing him to knit his brows. It was as if something unknown had dug into his heart and trampled on it.

Had he ever felt this sick before? He couldn’t remember. When he was young and dragged away as a mercenary slave, there were many times he had come close to death but rather than feeling sick, he had felt relief at being alive.

He held onto her as she fell asleep, breathing peacefully but he was unable to fall asleep for a long time.



The next day, Hugo gathered his vassals and informed them that Damian was now formally entered as his legal son.

“I have already announced that Damian will be my successor. Even if all of you show that you don’t accept my decision, it would be better to throw that attitude away since

you won't be changing my decision anyways."

It was the first time for the Duke to officially mention the young Lord ever since he announced that he would make Damian his successor, so his vassals looked very tense.

"The formally registered Young Lord is now my legal son. If you have a complaint, come and find me. I'm always ready to talk."

The word 'talking' from the Duke's mouth was more frightening than being threatened to be killed. Hugo threw a document in front of his vassals.

Lucia had repeatedly asked him to not interfere but he didn't want to just sit back and watch so he order Jerome to bring him a list of the garden party attendees.

Jerome had brought up the madam with a very awkward expression but once Hugo clicked his tongue, Jerome promptly brought the list. Hugo had only picked out the names of people among his vassals.

"It will be beneficial to those whose names are on this list to put more effort into supervising their household."

From Hugo's standpoint, this much couldn't even count as light reprimanding. He felt satisfied with himself for fairly complying with his wife's request to not interfere.

When the Duke left the scene, the ghastly pale vassals ran towards the list. To the vassals, 'Anyone whose name is on this list can think of themselves as dead' was what they heard.

They would definitely go home and interrogate their wives to get to the bottom of this. Through word of mouth, it would soon spread among the nobles that the noble wives who attended the garden party at the time were taught a severe lesson by their husbands.

It was only a matter of time before rumors spread that if one touches the Duchess, the fire-breathing dragon behind her, the Taran Duke would come forward.



A week had passed since the garden party and Roam was calm as usual. Lucia did not go out riding and was in the castle all week but this wasn't the first time she had stayed in the castle for a long time.

From the day after the garden party, Lucia acted as though nothing had happened and soon enough, the people around her forgot about the incident.

Damian sat reading a book in his room then turned his head to the feeling of something on his feet. Damian smiled as he watched Asha who had probably bumped into his leg as she was playing with her tail. These days, the baby fox was fastidiously following Damian around and was with him almost all day.

As the week passed, Damian thought about a lot of things. Rather than hurting him, the incident at the garden party had shocked the boy.

He had never felt so weak before. In that moment, his first thought was, 'If only my father was here.' In conclusion, compared to his father, his existence was comparable to dust.

Of all times, on that day, his father had gone out. Damian did not know yet that even if the Duke was in Roam at that time, it would have been hard for him to interfere in a women-only social event. However the boy realized that the absence of his father could occur at any time, and it would be up to him to protect his mother.

Damian knew very well that he was young. In the Academy, Damian was the youngest of his peers. Everywhere he looked, it was filled with people older than him.

No matter the will of the boy, nothing could be done about the flow of time but it was possible to increase his strength by having the will to do so.

Using the reason that Damian was young and his identity was unclear, there were many petty-minded and insignificant people who treated him as a joke and tried to provoke him. Such sloppy and foolish people were not even worth his time so Damian ignored them but ignoring made them fussier.

It was Damian's outstanding performance that made them not want to mess with him anyhow.

Ability is power.

This was the most useful realization Damian had come to at the Academy. Damian took Asha in his arms and stood up. He handed the fox over to a servant and asked for the fox to be taken back to its house then asked for Jerome to be told that he wanted to meet his father.



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